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THE QUEEN'S ADVOCATE



“ In a second she was in the grip of half a dozen men.”
(Chapter IX.)

The Queen's Advocate]

[Frontispiece

THE QUEEN'S ADVOCATE

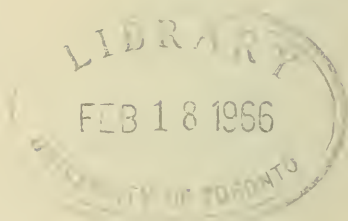
By

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Right of Sword," "An Imperial Marriage," etc., etc.

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	THE RESCUE	5
II	KARASCH	16
III	MORE WITCHCRAFT	25
IV	A CONTEST IN WILL POWER	34
V	UNWELCOME VISITORS	43
VI	A FIGHT FOR THE HORSES	52
VII	ESCAPE	60
VIII	WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT	68
IX	FROM BAD TO WORSE	77
X	AT POABJA	87
XI	TO SAMAC	94
XII	ON THE HILL AT SAMAC	99
XIII	PREPARING FOR THE CAMPAIGN	107
XIV	ELMA	115
XV	DEVELOPMENTS	124

CHAP.	PAGE
XVI THE ARMY'S PLANS	131
XVII THE QUEEN'S ADVOCATE	140
XVIII A DECLARATION OF WAR	149
XIX PRINCE ALBREVICS	159
XX THE INSULT	168
XXI THE DUEL	176
XXII THE SCENT OF PERIL	184
XXIII A PLAN OF DEFENCE	191
XXIV THE NIGHT OF TERROR	198
XXV IN GATRINA'S HOUSE	205
XXVI CHRIS TO THE RESCUE	214
XXVII MY DEFENCE	222
XXVIII " I CANNOT LEAVE MY COUNTRY "	228
XXIX PETROSCH HAS A PLAN	237
XXX THE CAMP AGAIN	246

The Queen's Advocate

CHAPTER I

THE RESCUE

CRACK !

It was a rifle shot, sure enough, somewhere in the hills, and Chris raised his huge head with a low growl and thrust his nose against me in warning.

I was lying on the flat of my back, my hands clasped under my head, thinking lazily, as I watched the glorious sunset amid the Gravenje hills and speculated when the storm which was brewing would break.

I had just been chuckling at the idea of what the men in Wall Street or the dandies of Fifth Avenue would have thought of Chase F. Bergwyn, millionaire, mineowner, and financier, could they have seen me then vagabondizing in the Bosnian hills. My dress was a kind of non-descript native costume, half peasant's, half miner's, very dirty and worn with my rough prospecting work ; and I carried a ten days' growth of scrubby beard on my sun-tanned face. The report of the rifle stopped the chuckle on my lips.

One of my men must have been after some hill game, I guessed, and in the eagerness of the chase had disobeyed my strict orders against shooting. I was anxious not to draw any unnecessary attention to my doings. I was after another pile, in fact. When in Vienna, just before, I had been offered what appeared to be a good thing in the shape of a concession to work a rich mining district in these Bosnian hills, and, as I still had a touch of the vagabond in me, I was roughing it in order that I might look into the thing for myself.

I knew that part of Eastern Europe pretty well. I had lived there as a lad with a relative stationed in

Prague, and as I had the knack of picking up the Balkan languages, he had found me of such use that he had taken me with him on many an expedition among the hills in Bosnia, Servia, and Herzegovina.

I had delighted in the hills, and had carried my love for them across the Atlantic when things changed and I went to the States in search of fortune. After a time of pretty hard rough-and-tumble hurly-burly buffeting I had "struck it rich," and turned up in New York wealthy enough to play a strong hand in the big gambles of Wall Street.

Then the wandering fever laid hold on me again, and, remembering my days in the Balkans, I was seized with the idea of utilizing the old experiences for business purposes. There was money to be made, I believed ; and I opened up communications with folks in Belgrade and Sofia, and was in Vienna, on my way to the Servian capital, when this Bosnian mining affair turned up.

The pile was there right enough, just waiting for some one to come along and harvest it. But whether the difficulties of harvesting it could be overcome, I should have to settle elsewhere ; and until they were settled I didn't wish to draw the inquisitive eyes of Austrian officials upon me.

There were other dangers, too. Lalwor, a hill village, was not far off, and the reports about the villagers were not pleasing. They were not likely to jump one's claim, or do anything of that sort, but were said to be quite ready to knock me on the head if they had an inkling that I was a rich foreigner.

So that, altogether, that shot annoyed me ; and I sat up, thinking no more about either New York or the sunset, but just how to find out who had fired it, and bent upon punishing him for disobedience.

Crack !

Another shot. This time nearer.

Chris showed greater uneasiness than before, and getting up ran forward sniffing the air. Almost immedi-

ately afterwards I heard a faint throbbing sound on the earth, uncommonly like a horse's gallop. But who could be galloping our way? No one who was at all likely to be welcome; that was certain. I scented trouble, and calling the dog back crouched with him behind a bush-covered hillock and gazed, not without some anxiety, up and down the steep, rough mountain road.

The camp—which consisted of a cottage or hut for my use, a shed for the horses, and a tent for the men—lay two or three hundred yards along a gully, which branched off at right angles from this road. I was lying at the mouth of the gully, and from my position commanded a view from the top to the bottom of the hill, about a mile in length.

Crack! crack!

Two more shots in quick succession; the throbbing sound of the hoofs came nearer and nearer; and a horse and rider showed at the top of the hill. I caught my breath in surprise as I saw the rider was a woman, who was urging her horse, a wiry little white animal, to its utmost efforts as it dashed at break-neck speed down the steep, winding, boulder-strewn, dangerous road.

Next, two horsemen came into sight and, with a loud shout, one of them reined up, and taking deliberate aim fired at the fugitive woman. My eye was on her as the shot rang out, and I saw the little white beast start, and swerve as if hit. The next instant the blood began to run freely over the flank, and the horse's gait told me it was badly wounded.

The men behind saw it, too; and the brute who had fired the shot shouted to his companion, and then continued the pursuit.

The chase was all but over. The white horse struggled on gamely, but as it neared the gully where I lay the pace slackened ominously. Its rider looked back at her pursuers; and then, to my further amazement, I saw that she was no more than a girl in years—and a very pretty one, too.

Her pursuers realized her plight ; and being now sure of capturing her, slung their guns and rode down the ugly path very cautiously.

I made ready to take my share in the business. I had my revolver in my hip pocket, and drew it out, but did not show myself. My intention was to let her pass and then get between her and the men. But her horse was done, and just before she reached the spot where I crouched the poor beast lurched badly and half sank on its quarters. The rider had only time to jump quickly from the saddle when the end came, and the little horse rolled over.

She must have given up all for lost then ; but she showed no sign of faltering courage. One swift, desperate glance round she gave, as if in search of some chance of escape, and I saw her face was pale and set, but full of determination. Then, drawing a dainty little stiletto from her dress, she stood at bay behind the body of the dying horse with a calmness all eloquent of pluck and nerve.

Meanwhile, with Chris at my heel, and keeping as much as possible under cover, I crept forward until I was opposite to her. The men dismounted when they were still some fifty yards or so above her, and they were rushing forward to close upon her when I showed myself, with Chris growling ominously at my side.

The surprise caused by my unexpected appearance gave me a moment's advantage.

"Have no fear. The dog will guard you," I called to her as I passed. "Guard, Chris, guard, good dog," I told him ; and instantly understanding me, he ran to her side.

"Thank God," I heard her murmur as I sprang toward the men, with my revolver levelled at them.

"You may give it up," I cried ; but that was not their view. One of them swung his gun round on the instant, and was in the act of levelling it at me when I fired, aiming low, and shot him in the leg, bringing him to the ground.

His companion hesitated at this, then clubbed his gun and appeared to be about to attack me, when he sud-

denly changed his mind and made a dart for the horses. I dashed after him, and as he vaulted into the saddle I fired at his horse and wounded it. Uttering a cry of rage, he leapt with extraordinary agility to the unwounded horse, and might then have got off had not the reins of both animals become entangled. Before he could disengage them I had closed up to him.

I called to him to surrender, but he had plenty of fight in him, and, taking me no doubt for the peasant I looked, he first struck at me furiously with his gun, and then tried to ride me down.

I checked that effort with a bullet in his horse's head, however, and threatened to put one into the man himself if he did not submit. But still he would not.

Leaping free of the falling horse he surprised me by running back down the hill helter-skelter towards the girl, who stood watching us with breathless interest. I thought he meant to attack her, and, wild with sudden anger, I rushed after him. He had apparently remembered, however, that his comrade's gun was loaded and his object was to secure it.

But Chris stopped this. The weapon lay near the girl and Chris sprang forward and snarled so savagely that the man hesitated, and before his hesitation was over I caught up and closed with him. Over and over we rolled in the dusty road in a fierce, hand-to-hand tussle. But I had the advantage of method. I was Cumberland bred, and in my boyhood had learnt some tricks and falls which had stood me in good stead before now in many a "scrap" in my rough-and-tumble mining days in Colorado and Montana.

I got my grip of him presently, and bit by bit moved my hands up till my fingers were playing on his windpipe, and he was seeing stars as I dashed his thick head again and again on the hard road, until all the fight and all his senses too were knocked out of him.

Then I rose, and taking the reins from the girl's horse, I tied him up securely with them.

All this time I had not spoken to her, except that first sentence ; but I had caught her great grey eyes fixed upon me questioningly as she followed every action. Before going to her I had a look at the man I had shot, and found his leg was broken between the knee and the ankle. I had some rough knowledge of surgery, so I probed about with my knife and found the bullet, which was in the muscular calf, cleansed the wound as best I could, and set the bone. Then I placed him in as comfortable a position as I could, and told him not to move until I could do more.

This done, I rose and went to the girl. She was now leaning against a boulder by the wayside, deathly pale, and to my infinite concern I saw that her dress was all blood-stained. One of the coward's bullets must have hit her, I thought.

"Are you hit?" I asked. I spoke in Serb, as I was more familiar with that than any other of the Balkan languages.

"No. It is the blood from this poor beast."

"Thank God for that. You're very pale, but you won't have any more trouble from the men. I'll see to that."

Instead of replying she appeared in some way to resent my tone of reassurance, and looked at me steadily with this curious expression of resentment mingled with gratitude and some fear. But she had made friends with Chris, and the great fellow was pushing his head against her as she stroked him.

"You were very brave," I said after a pause, during which I could not keep my eyes off her. She was indeed a beautiful girl, with a figure of queenly grace, and I dare say some of the intense admiration I felt may have shown in my glance.

"If that man is much hurt you had better see to him," she said, with a distinct note of command in her voice.

"His leg's broken. I'm going to get help."

"Help?" Quick suspicion prompted the question. "Do you live about here?"

I shut down a smile. She took me for a peasant ; and well she might, I thought, as I glanced down at my clothes.

" There is a cottage close here and a tent," I answered, evading her question and her glance. There was clearly a mystery about her to be solved. It was as evident as that she herself was well-born, and accustomed to give orders for which she expected prompt obedience. But leaving all explanations over for the time, I set about making a splint.

Returning to the men's horses I took off the bridle and saddle of the dead one, cut away the saddle flaps, and carried them and the reins to the injured man. The flaps made good splints, and I bound them tightly with the reins round his leg. He had borne all my crude surgery work with such stoicism that I guessed he was a Turk, and spoke to him in the little Turkish I knew, telling him I would get help and have him removed directly. He grunted something about being all right, and soon was smoking as placidly as though nothing had happened.

I returned then to the girl, who was sitting on the ground with her hands clasped over her face.

She sprang up quickly as I approached, and again stared at me with much the same expression of anxiety and doubt.

" You seem very clever and resourceful," she said. " Can you get me a horse ? "

" What for ? To lose yourself in the darkness among the hills ? "

" I can pay you—later, I mean. I have no money on me. Tell me how to send it to you, and I will give you any price you name. And I will add to it a generous reward for what you have done already."

" Do you think you are strong enough to travel yet ? "

" I can judge that for myself," she answered, almost haughtily, making a great effort to rally her shaken nerves.

"I don't think you are. You don't realize yet how much this thing has shaken you."

"I am not accustomed to be contradicted in this way."

"You are very near contradicting yourself by fainting," I answered. I could see it plainly. "How long have you been without food?"

"I do not wish you to question me. Can you get me a horse, or must I try to walk? I must have a horse."

"There's another reason. If you know anything of these hills you'll know what a storm means among them; and there's one brewing now. Listen." As I spoke we heard the rumbling of distant thunder.

"I cannot stay here, in any case," she shot back quickly. Then, after a pause, "Who are you? Your name, I mean?"

"My name is Bergwyn." I slurred the pronunciation intentionally. I had strong reasons for not wishing any one to know I had been on the hills on my mission.

But the effect of the name upon her was remarkable; and her agitation was too great to be concealed even by the effort she made.

"Bourgowan—the—the brigand? I have heard of you." The words were just a whisper, uttered with a catch of the breath all eloquent of terror.

"No, I'm not——" I began with a smile intended to reassure her; but before I could finish the sentence her own unfortunate guess had completed her undoing, and with a little gasping sob down she went in a heap to the ground unconscious.

Disconcerting as her collapse was, it nevertheless had the result of deciding me what to do. Another clap of thunder came at the moment; and, without waiting to think any longer, I picked her up and set off as quickly as I could along the ravine to the camp.

She had not recovered consciousness when I reached the cottage; and as there was but one room in it, I laid her on the bed, bundled my few things together, tossed

them out of sight, and leaving the dog with her, I went over to the tent.

I found my four men asleep there, and waking them, sent them down to bring up the prisoner and his wounded companion.

Then I began to realize what a really awkward matter it was likely to be to have a girl, and such a girl, quartered upon us. I was not by any means sure of my own men, even. They had been chosen by the guide; but even he had deemed them so worthless and unreliable that he had gone off that morning in search of others. Without him my position was very grave. He was already a couple of hours overdue; and with this storm coming up it was long odds that he would not arrive until the next morning at the earliest.

Still the thing had to be faced. I must take my chance in the tent with the men that night, and trust to my own authority and vigilance and wits.

I was alarmed to find the girl still unconscious; so I got some brandy, and supporting her head managed to get a few drops between her lips. This soon had an effect, and after a repetition of the remedy she opened her eyes with a deep, long-drawn sigh, and gave a great start as she found me bending over her and herself on the bed in the hut.

"It's all right," I said, soothingly. "You fainted, and I brought you here. You are perfectly safe, and the best thing you can do is to be quiet until you can eat something. As soon as you're well enough I'll find you a horse and send you wherever you want to go."

She listened very quietly, and smiled. A rare thing, that smile of hers.

"I want you to feel you can trust me. I am not that brigand, Bourgwán, or any other brigand, as it happens; although my name is sufficiently like his to cause you to make the mistake you did about it. It's all very rough here; but it's the best we can do for you. Now, do you think you can feel safe enough to eat and drink

something without believing we mean to poison you ? ”

“ Don’t.” It was only a whisper, but it was good hearing.

“ I’ve had to give you a little brandy. Here’s some more, if you’ll like it ; and I can get you some preserved milk and biscuits presently. Shall I leave you alone here ? ”

Just as I spoke the storm burst right overhead with a flare of lightning that filled the small room with lurid light, followed by a deafening clap of thunder.

But she showed no fear of the storm ; so that I gathered she was used to the violence with which they raged in that district. She sat staring out of the one narrow window wistfully and disconsolately.

“ I cannot go ? ” she said, making it almost a question.

I threw the door wide open, and pointed to the rain that was coming down in sheets.

“ Quite impossible—you can see.”

She rose and looked out, shuddered, and then went back to the bed with a sigh of disappointment.

There was silence between us : she sitting dead still on the low pallet, the dog haunched by her side ; and I standing, very ill at ease, near the door, not knowing what to say or do next, and feeling very much of an awkward fool. I wanted to know that she trusted me, and would have given anything for a word from her to show she did.

“ You feel better and—and safe ? ” I asked.

The lightning showed me that she moved slightly, turned her head and glanced toward me just for an instant, but said nothing.

“ I’ll get you something to eat,” I murmured fatuously, and went out and pelted through the rain to the tent.

I had got some biscuits and a tin of milk, when a thought occurred to me. The men had not returned, and their guns, piled in a corner of the tent, caught my eye as I was leaving. I made a bundle of them and carried them away. I could trust my men just as well if they had no firearms.

When I got back to the hut she was sitting on the side of the bed and had quite shaken off the faintness.

"You need not have gone through the rain—but I suppose you are used to it?" she said.

"A man in my position has to get used to anything. Here are the biscuits and the milk. I've some tinned meat in the cupboard here. Can you eat?"

"What are those?" she cried, pointing to the guns.

"The men's guns. Best to keep them in the dry, you see." I spoke as indifferently as I could; but she was very quick, and by the light of the storm I saw her eyes upon my face, with a sharp, piercing look.

"That's not your reason. I hear it in your voice. Is there anything more to fear?"

"No." It was a lie, of course, but I uttered it stoutly, feeling the need of it. "If you'll eat some of this and get some strength back, I'll explain the position presently."

"What's that?" she asked, starting and listening.

In an interval of the storm I heard the voices of the men raised in high tones.

"Nothing, only the men with the prisoner," I replied calmly; but I didn't understand the reason for the high voices, and didn't like it. "I'll just go and see them."

"Don't go, please." It was the note I had been waiting for so eagerly, and I felt myself go hot with pleasure. She did trust me.

"As you wish," I answered. "But I had better go."

There was a pause, and then she said, in a quiet level tone:

"You must do as you think best, of course."

"Chris here will answer for your safety. Try and eat something," I said; and with that I ran back again to the tent.

In a moment I saw something was wrong. My four men were clustered near the fellow whose leg I had broken, quarrelling angrily, with many gestures; while the man I had made prisoner was not in the tent at all.

"Where's the other man?" I asked.

They all turned at the sound of my voice, and one of them, with whom I had before had some bother, took the question to himself. He laughed insolently.

"He's escaped," he said, his tone a mixture of doggedness and defiance.

The trouble I had been looking for had come, just when it was most unwelcome.

CHAPTER II

KARASCH

I HAD had to deal with worse trouble than this before, however, and to tackle far more dangerous men than the fellow who, having sounded the first note of rebellion, stood eyeing me with lowering brows, while his fingers played round the haft of the knife he carried.

"See here, Karasch," I said to him; "I don't want any more trouble with you—or with any one else; but I'm not taking any insolence from you. Mind that, now. What do you mean by saying the prisoner escaped?"

Before he answered he glanced round at his companions.

"He ran away," he muttered.

"I tied him up so that he couldn't run. Who set him free? Whoever did that will answer to me."

"Karasch did it," answered one of the others. Then I guessed the reason of the high words I had heard, and that the speaker, whose name was Gartski, had been against the thing in opposition to the rest.

"Why did you do it, Karasch?"

"Because I chose to; I'm no wench minder," he replied with an insolent laugh.

I did not hesitate a second, but while the laugh was still on his lips I struck him full in the face as hard as I could hit him, and down he went like a ninepin. He scrambled up, cursing and swearing, and made ready to rush at me with his long knife, when I covered him with my revolver.

"Put that knife down, Karasch," I cried, sternly.

"Don't try any monkey tricks with me. And you others, choose right now which side you're on. I've been looking for this trouble for a couple of days past, and I'm quite ready for it."

Gartski came to my side, and one of the others, Petrov, drew to Karasch; the fourth, Andreas, remaining undecided.

"You're faithful to me, Gartski?" I asked.

"My life is yours," he answered simply.

"Good; then we'll soon settle this. Wait, Karasch. There isn't room for two leaders in this camp, and we'll settle this between us—you and I alone—once for all."

I took Gartski's knife and handed him my revolver.

"If any one tries to interfere in the quarrel, shoot him, Gartski," I said, and knife in hand I turned to the others. "Now, Karasch, if you're man enough, we'll fight on equal terms."

"Good," said the other two. It was a proposition fair enough to please them all, particularly as his supporters believed Karasch could account for me pretty easily in such a fight.

He was quite ready for the tussle, and we began at once. The tent was so gloomy—we had only the dim light from a couple of lanterns—that it was with some difficulty I could keep track of his eyes as he crouched down and moved stealthily around, watching his opportunity to catch me at a disadvantage for his spring, his long ugly knife reflecting a gleam now from one and now from the other of the lanterns as he moved.

The men drew to one side watching us.

My antagonist's fighting was in the approved cat-like method. Crouching low, he would move, with lithe, stealthy tread, for a step or two, then pause, then spring suddenly in a feinted attack, then as quickly recover himself, and begin all over again.

I stood all the time quite still; every nerve at tension, every muscle ready for the spring when the moment came, but wasting no strength in useless feints.

Never for an instant did my eyes stray from his ; noting every change of expression ; watching every movement, step, and gesture ; almost every breath he drew ; and using every second to find the weak spot in his attack.

I soon saw his purpose. He was striving to make me give ground and drive me back to where I should have no elbow room for free movement. But I did not yield an inch, not even when he sprang so near me in one of his feints as to make me think he meant business at last.

Instead of giving ground I began to take it. Twice he made as if to rush at me, and each time as he leapt back I stepped a pace forward. As the tent was too small to admit of his circling me, he saw that he was losing ground ; and I noticed a shadow of uneasiness come creeping to his eyes.

Then I saw my plan. My opponent's method had a serious flaw. During the moment that he was recovering himself after his feints he was incapable of attack, and if I could close with him at one of those moments I should have him at an immense disadvantage.

With this thought I drew him on. When his next feinting spring came I fell back a pace, and I could tell by the renewed light in his eyes that he felt reassured and confident. He had made me give way, apparently, and felt he could easily drive me back until he would have me at his mercy.

The next time I repeated the manœuvre, and then a grim grin of triumph lighted his face. He crouched again and moved about me, stalking me to drive me into an awkward corner of the place, his eyes gleaming the while with fierce confidence and murderous intent.

Inspired by this over-confidence, he sprang at me again, this time too far, calculating that I should again give way. But I did not, and as he jumped back hurriedly to retrieve the mistake I closed on him, caught his right wrist with my left hand, and pressed him back, chest to chest, holding my right hand away from his left, which groped frantically and desperately to clutch it.

In that kind of tussle he was no match for me. I had all a trained wrestler's tricks with my legs, and tripped him in a moment so that he went down with his left arm under him. I heard the bone snap as we fell, and I tore the knife from his grip.

His life was mine by all the laws of combat in that wild district, and for a moment I held my weapon poised ready to strike home to his heart.

To do him justice he neither quailed nor uttered a sound. He was a brave fellow, so I spared him and got up and turned to the rest.

"Do either of you dispute my leadership?" I said to the others. But they had had their lesson, and had apparently learnt it thoroughly.

"It was Karasch's doing, and his only," said Petrov, who had formerly taken sides against me.

"Get up, Karasch," I said, in a short sharp tone. He got up, and I saw his left arm was dangling uselessly at his side. "Now tell me why you set that prisoner free."

"You can fight. Your muscles are like iron. I'll serve a man who can fight as you can," he growled.

"That's a bargain," said I. "Here"; and I held out my hand. He looked at me in surprise.

"By the living God," he muttered, as he put his hand slowly into mine.

"Here's your knife," I said next, returning it to him.

He drew back, his surprise greater even than before.

"You trust it to me?" He took it in the same slow hesitating manner; and then with a quick change of manner he set his heel on it and with a fierce and savage tug at the haft, he broke the bright blade in two.

"It's been raised against you; and I'm your man now and for always," and down he went on one knee and seizing my hand kissed it, and then laid it on his head.

Demonstrative folk these rough wild hill men of Eastern Europe, and I knew the significance of this act of personal homage.

So did the others who had watched this quaint result

of the fight with the same breathless interest as they had followed the fight itself.

"If you serve me well you'll find I can pay better than I can fight, Karasch," I said, as he rose.

"I'm not serving for pay now," he replied simply. "I serve you. My life is yours. Gartski, go and saddle a couple of the horses."

"What for?" I asked.

"I'll go and find the prisoner. He can't have ridden far in this storm."

"But your arm is broken."

"We can tie it up while he gets the horses."

"Tell me why you set him free, Karasch," I said, as Gartski and Andreas went out. "And while you talk I'll see to your arm." I examined it, and found the fracture in the upper arm; and having set it as best I could I dressed it and bound it up while he spoke.

"On account of the woman," he said. "I know the man, and he told me about her. She's a witch and a thief and worse, and comes from Belgrade. She murdered a child, and was being sent to Maglai, in the hills, to be imprisoned; and this morning cast a spell over the men who were taking her and escaped. They were to have a big sum of money if they got her safe to Maglai, and the man promised me a share of it if I'd let him go back and bring his friends here to retake her. I have no mercy for a witch. God curse them all"; and he crossed himself earnestly and spat on the ground.

"She is no witch, Karasch, but just a girl in a plight."

"A witch can look just as she pleases. You don't know them, Burgwan"—this was how they pronounced my name. "She was an old woman when she left Belgrade. My friend told me that; and she's been growing younger every hour. She's known to be a hundred years old at least. She's cast her spell over you."

This was true enough; although not in the sense he meant. He was so obviously in earnest that I saw it was useless to attempt to argue him out of his superstition.

"Well, witch or no witch, spell or no spell, I am going to see her into safety," I answered firmly.

"You'll live to rue it, Burgwan. If I help you, it's because I serve you ; not to serve her, God's curse on her " ; and he crossed himself again and spat again, as he always did when he spoke of her. "If you want to be safe from her spells and the devil, her master, you'd better twist her neck at midnight and lop off her hands. It's the only way to break the spell when once cast."

"Ah, well, I'll try and find another way. And I'll take all the risks. Was that what you were all wrangling about when I came in the hut just now ? "

"Yes. She's done harm enough, already. That man's broken leg, three good horses killed, and now my arm " ; and he cursed her again bitterly. "It'll be you next," he added.

"It'll not be my arm that she breaks," was my thought.

Gartski came in then to say the horses were ready. Karasch rose at once, went out and mounted.

"I'll bring him back," he said, "I know I can find him unless that devil blinds the track."

"Why should she do that, as it's for her own advantage ? " I asked ; but he and Andreas were already moving off, and his answer was lost in the night air.

The storm had passed and the rain ceased. I watched the two men ride off, and as soon as they had passed out of sight I turned to the hut.

I did not enter, but stood near the little window and leant against the wall thinking. The tale I had heard concerning the girl had made me very thoughtful. Those who know anything of the ignorant superstition of the peasantry of the Balkans will best appreciate the danger to her of that grim reputation.

But it was not so much her danger that set me thinking then as the reason which must lie behind the accusation. Who could have been devilish enough to set such a brand upon her ; and why ? Did she know her reputa-

tion? There must have been some black work somewhere to account for the plight to which such a girl had thus been reduced.

High-born and gently nurtured she certainly was; accustomed to command and to be obeyed, as she had given abundant proofs; endowed with beauty and grace far beyond the average of her sex; and with innocence and purity stamped on every feature and manifesting itself in every act! Great enough to have powerful enemies, probably, I guessed; and in that I looked to find the key to the problem.

I was in the midst of these somewhat rambling thoughts when the casement was pushed open gently.

"Is it you, Burgwan?"

"Yes, it is."

"What are you doing there?" I was beginning to listen now for the little note of command in her voice.

"I am on watch."

"I have turned you from your cottage." This was half apologetic, followed directly by the other tone. "You will be well paid."

"Thank you." It was no use protesting. It seemed to please her to feel that she could repay me for any trouble; and it did no harm to humour her.

"The storm is over. Can we not start?"

"Where would you go?"

She hesitated. "I wish to get to the railway."

"To go where?"

"Do not question me."

"I beg your pardon. I am not questioning you in the sense you imply. There are two lines of railway about the same distance away. One leads to Serajevo, the other to Belgrade."

"How far away?"

"The former perhaps twenty miles; the other I don't know."

She caught her breath at this. "Where am I, then?"

"In the middle of the Gravenje hills."

"God have mercy on me." It was only a whisper ; but so eloquent of despair.

"You need not despair. It is as easy to travel forty miles as thirty ; and twenty are not much worse than ten. I will see you through." But this touched her dignity again.

"You shall be well paid," she repeated. I let it pass, and there came a pause.

"Can we not start ? "

"You have not told me which railway ; but it doesn't matter, as we cannot start to-night."

"Why not ? " The imperative mood again.

"My guide is not here."

"Your guide ? " Suspicion and incredulity now. "Do you mean to say you don't know your own country ? Do you expect me to believe that ? It is a mere excuse."

"Have you found me deceive you yet in anything ? "

"There may have been no cause yet."

"Will it not be more just to wait until you do find cause, then ? "

Another pause followed.

"I don't wish to anger you," she said, with a touch of nervousness ; and as if to correct the impression, she added : "Perhaps you do not think I can keep my promise to pay you."

"You may disbelieve me, but I don't disbelieve you. I have told you no more than the truth."

"But why do you need a guide ? " she asked after a moment's thought.

"Because I don't know the way."

"But if it is your own country, why don't you know it ? "

"It is not my own country." This surprised her.

"Who are you ? " was the next question. "And where do you belong ? "

"I am Burgwan."

"That is the name of the brigand."

" I know that ; but I am not a brigand. And now I think you had better try and rest. If we are to reach the railway to-morrow, it will be a long day's ride, and you must get some sleep. You can sleep in perfect safety, the dog will stay with you."

" You are a strange man, Burgwan. What are you ? "

" Does it matter so long as I can bring you out of this plight ? Do what I ask, please. Rest and get sleep and strength."

" Do you presume to give me your orders ? "

" Yes, when they are for your good. Have you eaten anything ? "

" Yes."

" So far well, then. Good night " ; and I moved a pace or two away.

" Where are you going ? "

" I shall be out here all night within call. And you have Chris." She looked at me in the moonlight and our eyes met.

" Why do I trust you, Burgwan ? " I started with pleasure.

" It doesn't matter so long as you do. Good night."

" It is a shame for you to have to stay there all night ; but I shall feel safe if you do."

" It's all right." I was smitten suddenly with nervousness and answered brusquely.

" I shall sleep, Burgwan. Good night."

Her tone had a touch of gentle confidence, and I thought she smiled. But I did not look straight at her and made no reply.

In one way she was a witch, truly enough ; she had cast over me a spell which made me feel to her as I had never felt toward any other woman ; and I leaned back against the wall with my arms folded thinking, thinking, aye, and dreaming, for all that I was full awake and my every sense alert and vigilant on my watch.

CHAPTER III

MORE WITCHCRAFT

THE night hours sped away with only one incident to disturb us. I heard a strange noise which I could not locate nor understand, and as I stood listening intently Chris, within the hut, barked loudly.

I heard the girl speak to him, and was half minded to ask her to let him out that he might help my watch ; but I heard nothing more, and so let the thing pass.

Day had broken before Karasch returned. He was alone, and had only failure and mishap to report. Trouble had dogged him from the start. He had not seen a trace of the man he had gone out to find. His companion's horse had put his foot in a hole and broken his leg, and nearly killed Andreas, who was lying some fifteen miles away in the hills ; while Karasch himself had twice been thrown, the second time with disastrous results to his broken arm.

He left no doubt as to where he laid the blame.

"We are bewitched, Burgwan," he said, his brow frowning and his glance threatening. "In five years I have never once been thrown ; and now twice within as many hours. The spell was upon us, and we were not meant to find the man."

"Does any one cast spells for their own hurt, Karasch ? It was necessary for her safety that the man should be caught and prevented from bringing his comrades here."

"You are not of this country, or you would know better. These devils work their own ends in their own ways. I lifted my hand against you because of her, and have brought the spell upon me. God defend us ;" and he crossed himself earnestly.

"But why should she help to bring her pursuers here ?" I repeated ; and might as well have reasoned with the wind.

"You do not know. He will never reach his friends ; or, if he does, the way hither will be hidden from them."

"Don't be a blind fool, Karasch," I exclaimed, losing my temper.

He looked at me and shook his head slowly with a suggestion of commiseration.

"It is not I who am the fool or blind, Burgwan," he answered, almost sadly. "Listen. The first time I was thrown, I saw before me a stretch of beautiful turf and pricked my horse to a gallop across it when he plunged right into a pit ; and I wonder I was not killed. The next time, just before dawn, I was feeling my way carefully when she herself appeared suddenly in front of me, all white fire, and flashing a gleaming sword before my eyes. I checked my horse, in fear, and he reared and fell back almost on top of me. Is not that enough to prove the spell ? "

It proved to me that he had either been asleep on his horse or was suffering from disordered nerves as the result of fatigue and the pain from his arm ; but when I told him so, he grew more morose and pitying in his manner.

"I know why you talk as you do," he said. "You have looked into her eyes. The spell is on you, too—on all here ; and we shall die—unless she does." The last three words were uttered after a long pause, during which he had glanced ominously and fearsomely toward the hut. Superstition held him in its thrall.

I judged it best to check the thought under the words at once,

"The man who lays a finger on her to her hurt will have to reckon with me, Karasch," I said, sternly, and turned away.

He made no reply, but rode on to the shed some distance to the rear of the tent, where we stalled the horses.

I began to scent a fresh danger for the "witch," and was fast growing as anxious as she herself could be to get away. If Karasch believed that he would be saving me from the spell by killing her, I knew he was quite capable of doing it in the face of any commands I might lay upon him and the others.

It was easy to guess at his crude reasoning. I had looked into her eyes, and was thus under her spell while she lived. My orders for her safety would thus be regarded as the result of the accursed enchantment ; and they would only have to kill her to free me from the spell and make me to see that they had done the right thing. They would feel that I should then be as eager to reward them for her murder as I was now to forbid them touching her.

Added to this was the actual and pressing danger arising from the fact that the man who had pursued her had escaped to carry the tidings of her whereabouts to his companions and bring them down upon us, perhaps in force.

The situation was growing tighter with every fresh turn, and I made up my mind to rush matters and get away at once. I would not wait for the return of my guide, but take the risk of finding my way alone.

I had just made this decision when Gartski came running round the tent with a white, scared face.

"The horses have been killed, Burgwan. Will you come to the shed to Karasch ?"

The news, if true, was ill enough to make me change colour, and I went back with him.

"We are all under a curse. It is witch's work," he said in a curiously awed tone ; and he wrung his hands and crossed himself. I was beginning to regard that gesture of devotion with a pretty considerable dislike by that time.

The news was true enough. The three horses lay dead on the shed floor, each in a pool of blood ; and on the quarter of each of them a small ring of blood was to be seen some two inches across. Peering into the shed stood the horse from which Karasch had just dismounted, his neck outstretched and his ears cocked in fear.

Karasch and Petrov were inside, preternaturally grave and awestruck. Both looked as frightened as Gartski when he had come running with the news to

me; and Karasch pointed ominously in turn at the marks on each of the dead animals.

"The witch's mark. It's always there," he said.

It was unquestionably very strange, and I looked solemn enough, no doubt, to lead them to believe I was beginning to share their own superstitious fears. It was about the worst thing that could have occurred at such a juncture.

With an effort I roused myself and examined the "witch's" mark on each of the beasts. A circle had been cut with the point of a sharp knife, the mark being just skin deep.

"How did they die, do you think, Karasch?"

He pointed again to the marks and smiled grimly, as though the cause were too plain to need words.

"And all this blood?" I said.

He shrugged his great shoulders.

I looked at Gartski and the third man closely, for any sign that they had had a hand in it; but their superstitious fear was too genuine to be doubted.

"Turn the horses over," I ordered; but they refused to put a finger near them.

"Who is smeared with the blood of a witch-killed beast dies before the moon is old," said Karasch.

"You're a set of fools," I cried angrily. But neither anger nor request was heeded.

I took the iron bar from the door, and levering it under the smallest of the horses turned the carcass over sufficiently to find what I sought—the cause of death. There was a wound just under the heart. The horse had been stabbed with a long knife.

I went outside then and searched the ground all round the door carefully.

"Come back to the tent, all of you," I said. I led the way, scrutinizing every inch of the ground and following a somewhat unaccountable trail I had discovered. It led direct to the tent.

"Let me see to your arm, Karasch," I said first, intend-

ing to let them have some minutes to recover from the first effects of their stupefaction.

"No, Burgwan. You have cursed blood on you. You cannot touch me. I should die, too."

"Very well, then, we'll settle this thing first. You saddled Karasch's horse last night, Gartski. Did you fasten the shed afterwards?"

"No; we never fasten it. Bars won't keep out devils."

"This is the work of no devil. Those horses have been killed by some one who plunged a knife into their hearts and then cut that ring on the haunch. I saw the wound myself on the beast I examined. They were all right when you left them?"

"Yes, quite right."

"Did either of you go near the shed again until Karasch returned, or did you sleep?" I asked next, remembering the strange noise I had heard in the night.

"We had had a long day, and both slept soundly."

"We're getting very close to it now," I answered. I turned to our prisoner with the broken leg. "How is your leg this morning, my man?"

"Very painful, but better," he replied after a pause.

"Did you sleep, or did you hear anything in the night?"

"I slept all through the night. I was asleep when you came in just now."

"Then it ought not to be so painful. I'll have a look at it."

"No, no," he cried, putting up his hands to ward me off. "Don't touch me. You have touched the accursed blood."

"Do you believe in it, too?" and I looked keenly at him.

He crossed himself earnestly and spat on the floor.

"Stay, stay. You're a Turk! why do you cross yourself with the cross of the Christians? I won't touch you against your will, but I must see how your leg is doing. Lift him up, Gartski," and I pointed to a bench.

They hesitated. "Do as I say; and smartly, too. You know me," I cried sternly.

The man objected and protested with many oaths. But I insisted; and the others did not dare to disobey me.

The mystery was instantly plain to me. The man was smeared from head to foot with mud and blood, the traces of which he had tried to remove; and lying where his body had covered them were a knife and a small lantern.

He was a faithful servant to his masters, whoever they might be; and he had conceived the design of killing the only horses we had, in order to prevent the escape of the girl before his comrades could return to recapture her.

Waiting until the two men in the tent were fast asleep he had dragged himself, painfully, through the mud to the shed, had shut himself in, and had deliberately stabbed one horse after the other, putting on each the witch's mark. He knew the superstition about it, of course, and trusted to that to save him from the risk of discovery. I had seen the slimy trail he had left in the mud, however, and had thus detected him.

With what dogged effort he had acted and the stoical endurance he had shown were evidenced by the condition of his wounded leg. The splints had been torn off, and he must have suffered excruciating agony in the grating of the fractured bones.

I drew Karasch aside. "You can see for yourself what happened," I said, significantly. But his superstition was proof even against such evidence.

"You do not understand, Burgwan; I do," he replied, in the same dismal fanatical tone.

"The thing can be seen as plainly as a mountain in the moonlight," I exclaimed, impatiently. "He wants to prevent our getting away until his companions get here." But Karasch only shook his head.

"You can see that he did it, can't you, man?"

"I can see she used his body to do it. They often do that. He did it in a dream. His hand ; her mind. I'll question him."

"And put a ready-made lie into his thoughts," I exclaimed, angrily.

"It is witch's work, more than his," he repeated, stubbornly and doggedly. I felt I should lose my temper if I stayed longer, and tossing up my hands in despair at his folly, I gave up talking sense to him.

I washed off the traces of the blood from my hands, and having got materials for a breakfast, went away to the hut, where the girl appeared at the door and smiled. I must keep the knowledge of danger from her, of course, so I went down and pretended to busy myself with my packages while I pulled myself together.

I picked them up and went on to the hut, whistling a strain of the "Star-Spangled Banner," and trying to appear as if I hadn't a thought in the world above breakfast.

"Good morning, Burgwan," she said, with a sort of chary patronage and encouragement.

"Good morning. I have brought your breakfast. Very homely diet, but the best we can offer you here."

"Never mind. What time do we start?"

"The guide is not come yet," I answered, conscious that my pause would rouse her suspicions.

"But I cannot wait long."

"That's true enough." I spoke the thought aloud, unwittingly.

"What does that mean?" Very sharply asked, this.

"I can't answer any questions yet. I have to think."

The reply appeared to offend her, and her eyes flashed as she drew herself up with a gesture of authority. She was turning back into the hut when she caught sight of some stains on my clothes.

"That is—blood?" She paused before the word.

"Yes, it's blood."

She shrank from me for a space against the lintel.

"It's horse's blood. We've had some trouble in the stables, and I'm afraid I don't cut a very pretty figure just now." I tried to make light of it in this way ; but it was a feeble effort.

"Tell me—at once. The truth, please." There was eagerness now in her tone.

I hesitated. "I suppose you'd better know it," I said then. "There has been foul play in the night, and our horses have been killed."

"How many?"

"All but one—and he's lame."

"Is this true? or is it an excuse to keep me here?"

I winced. The injustice bit deep.

"If you'll put that question plainly, perhaps you'll see it in its proper light, and understand how it may sound to me. No, I don't mean that. It doesn't matter. I have told you the truth ; that's all."

"But it does mean delay?"

"I'm very sorry ; but thirty or forty miles make a long march for a lame horse. I could manage on foot, of course, but——" I left the sentence unfinished.

She started, and bit her lip as she realized my meaning. To avoid seeing her distress, and to fill the pause, I dropped one of the tins I was carrying and stooped to pick it up.

"I have to beg your pardon, Burgwan, for doubting you."

"That's no account, I assure you. I couldn't have helped it myself if the position had been reversed. The truth does sometimes look strangely like falsehood."

"But you don't seem to understand that I must get away. I must."

"I do realize it," I answered, very earnestly, "and mean to find a way, somehow. I'm not easy to beat, most times."

"When can we start, then?" I noticed the "we," and I think it had something to do with putting me off my guard.

"I shall have to think a bit," I said.

"It must be soon, Burgwan. What time is it now?"

Without thinking, I pulled out my watch from an inner pocket—a big gold chronometer on a gold chain—and the moment I caught her quick eyes on it I saw the mistake, and regretted it.

"Just six o'clock," I answered, as indifferently as I could.

"That's a very valuable watch you carry in these lonely hills"; and her look spoke her thought much more eloquently than her words.

"It's a very good timekeeper," I answered at random.

"How did you get it?"

"Are you not over quick with your suspicions?"

"Am I to fear you—or trust you?"

"If you trust me it will have to be without asking any questions—at present. You have no reason to fear me; and never will have."

"You must tell me where you got so valuable a thing—you, a peasant of the hills?"

"I am not a peasant of the hills."

"Where did you get it?"

"If I told you, you would scarcely believe me."

"Where?" she insisted.

"I bought it; that's all."

She drew a deep breath and bit her lip.

"I have believed you to be true and honest. If you fail me I have no hope. And if you mean me harm, for the sake of God tell me so." She spoke with intense but carefully restrained passion until the last few words.

"Don't take it like that," I replied, firmly and calmly, although moved to the core by her appeal. "I will tell you something. I am not what I may have seemed to you. I am no peasant and no brigand, as you seem to fear. Who and what I am, and why here, I cannot tell you yet; but, believe this, I will serve you and save you from this trouble. My word is my word, and you may trust it."

She listened intently, and when I finished she bent forward and gazed searchingly right into my eyes. Then she drew a deep, long breath, as of relief, and smiled.

"Thank God, I feel I can trust you. I will not question you again, Burgwan."

CHAPTER IV

A CONTEST IN WILL POWER

AFTER that incident there was something of a change in the curious relations between us. She was just as imperious at times ; but less patronizing. She seemed to expect my services less as a return for payment to be made, or by right of caste and station, than in virtue of her womanhood and helplessness. Either she now believed entirely in my good faith, or she was anxious to make me think she did.

I went back to the tent to wash my face and hands and endeavour to get the bloodstains from my clothes.

The men were eating their breakfasts and talking together with lowered brows and gloomy faces.

"What are we to do, Burgwan?" asked Karasch, coming over to me presently.

"There will be no work to-day. I shall remain in camp."

"Who is to fetch Andreas?" This was the man who had ridden with him on the previous night and lay out on the hills.

"I can't spare the horse, now we have only one. One of you must take food to him on foot, and try to hire or buy some horses in place of the dead ones."

"It will not do," he said, lowering his voice. "I cannot walk so far ; and you can't trust the others."

"I can trust Gartski."

"Not after this morning's business with the witch-killed beasts."

"Don't talk such nonsense, Karasch. I proved to you that that treacherous devil over there stabbed them to prevent us getting away."

"He has explained that. He had a vision and remembers it now. She stood over him with a flaming sword, just as she appeared to me, and compelled him to do it."

"How a man of your shrewdness can believe such rot passes my understanding, Karasch. You might be a great baby if I didn't know you were a brave and clever man." But flattery was of no more use than reproaches.

"You don't understand these things, Burgwan." The dogged manner and tone alike showed that he spoke with dead conviction.

"Then the best thing will be for the lot of you to clear out," I exclaimed testily.

"You can't be left alone in her power. I shall stay with you to the end. You gave me my life when I had lost it fairly, and I'll save yours in return."

"What do you mean?" I asked sharply, as a glint of his intention shot into my thoughts. Instead of meeting my eyes as usual, he looked down and shuffled uneasily.

"The spell must be broken and then you'll see the truth and—and no harm may come to you after all."

"What do you mean?" Speak out, Karasch, and meet my eyes openly like a man, as you usually do." But this he would not or could not do.

"There is only one way," he said doggedly. "And it must come to that in the end. We have talked it over. Your life must be saved."

"I should have thought you all knew by this time that I can take pretty good care of that for myself."

"There is only one way," he repeated in the same dogged tone.

"And what is that way? Out with it, man, in plain terms."

"She must die, Burgwan, or you will."

I thought a moment, and then saw a different line and promptly adopted it.

"You are too late, Karasch," I said, as gravely and solemnly as I could speak.

"No, there is always time within the same moon."

"No ; she has rendered me proof against any knife or bullet for three days on condition that I defend her. And I've sworn that I will die before any one shall harm her."

It was a beautiful bluff. He started back and looked at me in manifest horror, and crossed himself as he muttered a prayer.

"Don't do that, you hurt me, Karasch," I said, pretending to shudder.

"Great God of all. And you a Christian, Burgwan."

His agitation was almost piteous. He turned deathly pale and beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, as he stared at me horror-struck. "And I have sworn to save you." It was just a whisper of dismay and helplessness, and it showed the struggle which was raging between his superstition and his fealty to me.

"I'll release you from your oath to me, if you wish ; and you and the rest can leave as soon as you like."

"No, by God, no ; not if I'm damned forever," he cried. "I'll stand by you, Burgwan, mad blind fool though you've been."

His devotion moved me deeply. I knew how much the effort must cost him. He believed that he was jeopardizing not his life only, that he was always ready to risk, but his very soul as well. Rough, coarse, crude, ignorant, half civilized boor that he was, he had shown a fidelity to me such as I had never witnessed before. He should have a reward ; and it should be rich enough to surprise him if ever we got out of this mess ; but I could say nothing of it to him then. He would have laughed to scorn the promise of money in such a case. I accepted his sacrifice therefore without another word.

"What shall we do about Andreas ?" I asked. "Gartski and Petrov had better go out to him."

"No. If they go, it will be only to find help and bring others back here to do what you say must not be done. Andreas must take his chance."

"You must go somewhere then, and find us horses."

"If I take my eyes off those two they'll run away. I must stay to watch them."

"But we must have horses and at once," I urged.

"Tell her to send some here. She can if she chooses." His belief in her supernatural powers was complete; but that time it served to turn the tables with a vengeance. I had no answer.

"It must be as you say. I'll ask her"; and with that I left the tent, wishing that the miraculous supply of horses were as easy of accomplishment as Karasch believed.

There was one that I could have, however, and I deemed it best to make sure that neither Gartski nor Petrov should have the chance of stealing it. So I led it over to the cottage to tether it close at hand.

Hearing me, the girl came out.

"You have horses, then?" she asked, in a tone of satisfaction.

"I have this one, that's all"; and I fastened it up to a tree close by the hut.

"You are looking very serious, Burgwan. Has anything more happened?"

"A little misunderstanding with the men. Have you breakfasted?"

"Yes. Can we start now?" she asked. "I wish to reach the railway that will carry me to Belgrade."

"That means thirty miles through a country where I don't know a yard of the road"; and I shook my head.

"You always raise difficulties."

"No; I don't raise them, I see them. That's all. I wish I didn't. It may come to it at the last—but we had better wait for the guide. He ought to be here soon now."

"Don't the men know the road?"

"We had better wait for the guide."

"Are not you the leader here?"

"In a way, yes; but not in such a matter. I am thinking all I know to find the best thing to do."

"But suppose the others should come first before this guide, what then?"

"What others?"

"The rest of the men who were taking me to Maglai."

"Oh, you were going to Maglai. How many were there?"

"Six. Four beside the two you captured."

"How far from here were you when you escaped?"

I noticed that she no longer resented my questions as on the previous night.

"I don't know. It was about noon, and they called a halt; and having fed and drunk they lay down and slept, leaving one to watch. But he fell asleep, too, with the heat, and I stole off. I rode fast for some hours, and then was going slowly, thinking I was safe from pursuit, when suddenly the two appeared in the distance and chased me."

"You had been riding about seven hours or so, then. That means fourteen at least, without the delay of the storm; and then he'd have to chance finding them."

"Whom do you mean by 'he'?"

I had been calculating roughly how long it would take the man Karasch had set free to reach his friends and return with them, and unwittingly had spoken the thought aloud. I pretended not to hear her question.

"You don't know whether all the men rode after you on the same road, or spread out in different directions?" I asked.

She made no reply, and when I glanced up I met her eyes bent earnestly upon me.

"You are concealing something from me. You heard my question, I know, for I saw you start."

With a curious feeling that I was at a disadvantage sitting down below her, I stood up.

"You had better leave the run of this thing to me. I won't ask any more questions than I am compelled; and if they bother you, you can turn a deaf ear to them, as I do when I don't want to hear yours."

Signs of rebellion flashed from her eyes, and she made ready to give battle. She held her head high and squared her shapely shoulders.

"I won't be dictated to like that, and I won't remain here on any such terms."

"I am not dictating; I'm talking common sense."

"I won't submit to it; I will not." And she stamped her foot. "I will have an answer to my question. I won't have things hidden from me. Why won't you answer it?"

"Didn't I tell you I had my deaf ear to it?"

"How dare you try to pass it off with a flippant jest like that? Who are you to presume to insult me?"

"Do you really think I wish to insult you?" I asked, very quietly.

"What you wish to do I neither know nor care. But it is an insult, as even the commonest instinct of courtesy would tell you."

"We rough men of the hills haven't much to do with courtesy."

"You are not of the hills, you know that. You told me you were no peasant. Do you suppose I can't see that for myself?" I made no reply, and after a pause she added, "I know why it is you will not answer me. You think I must be a coward because I am a woman."

"Is that another of the commonest instincts of courtesy—the average man's courtesy, I mean?" I said this with the deliberate intention of irritating her to keep her away from the matter. But she saw my purpose instantly.

"Will you answer that question of mine?"

"Let us finish first with mine, and then you ask what you will."

She paused to think, and then nodded as if in answer to her thoughts.

"I am not a coward to be frightened by bad news, and I have already guessed the answer to it."

"Then there can be no need for me to tell it you," I said.

She waited again, and then looking at me fixedly said, with an air of deliberate decision: "If you do not tell me, I will not remain here another minute."

This was a challenge to a trial of wills; and I took it up at once.

"You are not a prisoner," I said, and stepped aside ostentatiously as if to leave the way free for her.

"Can I have that horse there?"

"I'll saddle him for you."

"Which road do I take to get to the railway?"

"I don't know, but I can give you a map and a compass."

"Get them, please," She had plenty of will, that was certain; but I couldn't afford to let her bluff me. I went into the cottage and rummaged about till I found the compass and the map, and then added a touch of realism. I took a spare revolver and loaded it, and held it out to her with some extra ammunition.

"You had better take these as well." She took them and then drove in the spur in her turn, by saying in her haughtiest manner—

"You shall be paid for them, Burgwan."

"You can give the value of them to a charity in Belgrade," I answered. We were both angry now. "Are you ready?"

She was pinning her hat, and when I saw that her fingers trembled, I had hard work to persist. But I held on.

"Yes," she said, after a moment.

We went out and I untethered the horse, and with Chris in close attendance, we walked without speaking to the mouth of the ravine, close to where her horse still lay.

"Will you hold him, while I get the side-saddle?" Our eyes met for a moment, and I saw that at last she was convinced I was in earnest.

I turned away, feeling bad, and unbuckled the girths from the dead animal, and then saddled the one she was

to ride. I took plenty of time over the work, too, hoping she would see the madness of what she proposed to do and give in. But she showed no sign of doing anything of the sort ; and at last the work was done.

"All is ready," I said, giving a last look at the bridle. "Can you mount by yourself, or shall I help you?"

She made no answer, but stood with her head half averted, looking away down the steep mountain road. She was biting her lips strenuously, and the fingers which held up her skirt were tightly, almost fiercely, clenched. But I held my tongue and just waited.

Then she turned to me. She was very pale, but her eyes were flashing.

"I thought you were a man," she cried, between her set lips. I met her look steadily without a word. And we stood so for the space of some seconds ; her face the embodiment of hot passionate contemptuousness ; mine as impassive as a stone. "And what a coward you are!"

I stood as though my ears were indeed deaf.

She still hesitated ; and the woman who hesitates can be saved as well as lost.

Then came the last effort of her pride.

"Lead the horse to that stone. I will not soil myself by letting you help me."

I led him where she pointed ; and she mounted with the ease of a practised horsewoman. She even gathered up the reins and settled herself in the saddle ; and then waited to look almost yearningly for some sign from me. I gave none, but held the bridle as if I had been her groom.

Chris stood looking from one to the other of us as if in deep perplexity.

"Will you take the dog?" I asked.

Then came the end.

"Do you mean me to go?" It was all I had been waiting for.

"No, not now," I answered at once ; "since you see the folly of it."

"How dare you? I WILL go now"; and she gripped the reins tightly and touched the horse with her heel. But he hadn't much fire in him, and obeyed my hand on the bridle instead of her heel. I held him with my left hand and stretched out the other toward her.

"Come; you had better dismount. This folly has gone far enough"; and I put as much command and authority as possible into my tone.

I shall never forget the look she gave me, nor my surprise when a second later she put her hand into mine and slipped off the saddle. The rush of relief was too great for her to simulate further anger.

"How hard you can be. I thought you meant it," she murmured.

"You shouldn't try in this way," I said. "I had to show you that my will is stronger than yours; and you made the lesson hard."

"Would you have let me go?" she asked.

"No, certainly not."

"Oh, I wish I had held out," she exclaimed, vehemently.

I smiled.

"We call it bluff in the States; and I am an older hand at it than you. That's all."

"The States?" she asked quickly. "What States?"

"United States. I am an American, you see, naturalized, that is; I'm English by birth."

"American? English? But I thought . . ." Face, eyes, everything eloquent of questioning surprise.

"Yes, I know. You thought all sorts of things except the right one. But anyway, I'm not quite the coward you thought just now."

"Don't."

"No, I won't again. Come, let us get back to the cottage. We haven't lost after all by this—we have the side-saddle."

"I don't know what to think or say," she cried, in dismay.

"I can understand your purpose. But let us get back, please"; and with that we went, I leading the horse as before and she walking by my side, Chris keeping close to her as though in some way he understood everything.

Again it was a silent walk at first; but this time the motives for silence were very different.

CHAPTER V

UNWELCOME VISITORS

THAT contest of wills marked another very distinct advance toward a better understanding between us. My companion's interest was stimulated and her curiosity piqued; and our relationship was at once placed upon a footing of personal equality. She made that plain—intentionally, I think—her momentary chagrin at defeat in the trial of strength between us overshadowed completely by her sense of relief and reassurance.

When I had returned from tethering the horse, she was standing by the house.

"Can I help you?"

"No, thank you."

"I have nothing to do."

"I'm afraid I can't find you anything."

"Don't you do any work in the camp, then?"

"Not to-day. You see it's a kind of holiday."

"Why?"

"The work here is finished. I'm getting ready to leave. As soon as Georgev—that's the guide, you know—gets back I shall be off."

"I suppose I am not to ask what the work was?"

"I did not intend to tell you, but if you wish it I will. This is a prospecting expedition. I've been looking to see if any mines could be opened here. Of course, it's a sort of secret, you know."

"Oh, you're hoping to make money here?" and the glance she gave at my clothes told me her thought.

"You are an engineer?"

"No, I am a prospector. I have done it before in the States."

"I hope you will be successful. But I am sure you will. You are the kind of man that does succeed ; so masterful, I mean." We both smiled at the word.

"Yes," she added, as if in answer to my thought ; "I am judging by what has just occurred, for one thing."

"I am afraid I seem a bit of a brute."

"I don't think so. I—I was very angry when I said what I did. I—I didn't mean it ; and I'm—I'm sorry."

"I'm not. I know you don't think it now ; but you meant it then ; and it was just what any one else would have meant and said. It helped us to understand things better. That's all. I was very much afraid you meant to ride off alone, and then . . . well, I don't know about then."

"I wish I had known your thoughts," she said, with a sort of half mischievous regret.

"You mean you would have outplayed me ? "

She nodded and smiled, "Yes."

"Well, please don't try it again. It might be very dangerous play."

"I won't, I promise you," she said readily, understanding from my serious tone that I was very much in earnest. "When you use that tone I have no rebellion left in me. I am like Chris, I suppose, in that."

Chris himself interrupted us then by growling, and looking round I saw Karasch coming from the tent.

"Chris hates Karasch," I told her. "The man struck him once savagely, and I had all my work to keep the dog from his throat."

"He is a fierce-looking man," she said.

"But he will serve me now, faithfully, and Chris must make friends with him. Will you go into the hut a moment ? Come, Chris," and as she went away I led the dog to Karasch and made him understand that he was to regard the man as a friend. It was not easy, for Karasch himself was afraid ; but I stood by while

he patted the dog's head, and I made Chris lick his hand. Then I sent him back to the hut.

"Now, Karasch, what is it?" I asked.

"The devil is it, Burgwan. I slept and Petrov has gone."

It was ugly news, and made me grave.

"So you couldn't even keep watch, for all your big words," I said angrily.

"It has never chanced so before," he replied sullenly; and his glance across toward the cottage told me the thought behind the words.

"If you were to cut your finger I suppose you'd set it down to the same cause just now. You have served me an ill turn. You can send Gartski to find him, the sooner the better."

"You are mad, Burgwan."

"Mad to have trusted to your keeping awake, perhaps. Not in this. If one has got away, where's the use of keeping the other? When we had both safe, it was well; but two can do no more harm than one away; and we needn't be bothered by keeping watch over a traitor. I'll speak to him."

"Come here, Gartski." He rose sheepishly and crossed to me. "How long has Petrov been gone?"

"I was asleep, and know nothing," he lied glibly.

"Yesterday, when the trouble was here, you took my side; now you are against me, and want to go."

"I am not against you," he began, with much gesticulation.

"Don't lie. I have means of knowing everything in your thoughts."

He shrank back a pace and trembled, and crossed himself.

"You know what I mean, I see," I said. It was no good to have a reputation for witchcraft and not make use of it. "If you lie to me now," I went on, looking into his eyes with as fierce an expression as I could assume, "you will not outlive the present moon. Tell

the truth, and no harm will come to you." Glancing at my hand I saw I had broken the skin in tending the horse, and I smeared a little circle of blood on the tent post close by. "If that dries before you speak, it will be too late, Gartski," I said solemnly.

It seemed to be a very reliable card to play, this superstition of theirs. He looked at the little circle in horror, his face went ashen white and he trembled violently.

"We meant nothing against you, Burgwan; only against the witch," he mumbled.

"It is drying fast, Gartski. Beware."

"Petrov has gone to get help to deal with her."

"To murder her, you mean?"

"It is no murder. To kill her for your sake, I swear."

"Where has he gone?"

"To the priest at Lalwor—the hill village."

"How far is that, and in what direction?"

"Four leagues up the hills to the south."

"How long has he been gone?"

"Less than an hour."

"Come"; and I put my hand on his shoulders, and led him out of the tent. "I have no use for spies and traitors here. You can go after him. Get away, or I'll set the dog on you"; and with that I shoved him from me—with a parting kick to which the rage I felt gave additional force. He limped a few paces and then turned and looked back at me. "Go," I thundered, making a step toward him, and then he ran in a limping fashion comical enough to have drawn a smile had the position been less grave.

I had frightened enough of the truth out of him to show me that no ill results could follow for a few hours. It would take Petrov some three hours to reach the hill village; some time would be needed to get together a posse, and I felt that I might safely wait an hour or two longer in the hope that Georgev would arrive.

I returned to the hut then and found the "witch" studying the map.

"I was going to ask you for that," I said.

"Can we start?"

"Not yet; I am still waiting for the guide and the horses he may have with him; but I want to make out our way."

Instead of giving it to me she clasped her hands over it as it lay on her lap.

"I want to ask you a favour." Things were changing indeed.

"Well?"

"Won't you tell me what all this means? You have had more words with your men. I know it is about me. Won't you tell me?"

"They are a set of fools; and they are all gone now, except the big fellow, Karasch, whose arm is hurt—broken, in fact."

"Of course, it is on my account, and, of course, also it means danger of some kind. I am not afraid to know it with—with Chris and—and you to protect me."

"I have quarrelled with the men—have just kicked one of them out of the camp, in fact. That's all."

She sighed and lifted up her hands.

"Can't you see that this uncertainty is worse to bear than any knowledge could be, however bad?" She was strangely gentle now.

"You needn't exaggerate things because you don't know them."

"Here is the map. You try me very much. Tell me, please," she urged as I took the map. I fingered it thoughtfully.

"You must not frighten yourself."

"I am not frightened—except that I think there must be some terrifying news you keep back, fearing to frighten me. You put a great strain on my nerves."

"I had not thought of that, and there is no need for it. I will tell you enough to show you that. I have had trouble with the men; and it is about you. They are only under me because I hired them to do certain

work. Well, that prisoner whom I shot in the leg yesterday got at them with a tale that you were a prisoner of such importance that a considerable sum of money was to be paid for your safe delivery at Maglai ; and they had a fancy to help in earning it. We quarrelled about it, and they've left the camp."

"Who do they say I am?"

"They do not know, and could not tell me ; of course ; and I myself do not even know how to address you. You must have seen this—whether madame or mademoiselle even?"

"You put your question adroitly, Burgwan. Are you Burgwan, really? But you can't be, of course. You are American."

"It is the name I have here ; and I did not know how pleasant a sound it had until I heard you speak it. I would rather you called me by that name than any other. And you?"

She had her hands in her lap and kept her eyes bent down as she slowly clasped and unclasped her white fingers. Then she lifted her face and looked at me with a slow, hesitating smile.

"You might called me—Barinschja."

"That is Russian for an unmarried woman, isn't it?"

"Did you think I was married?" The smile in her grey eyes was unmistakably brighter.

"I did not think you were Russian."

"I am not. I am a Serb."

"Then what we have to do is to get you to Belgrade as soon as possible, Barinschja," and I turned to the map.

"No. I cannot be Barinschja to you. I will be mademoiselle."

"I thank you." I understand enough Russian to appreciate the difference. Barinschja is from inferior to superior ; mademoiselle from equal to equal. "Then it shall be mademoiselle. Now for the map."

"No, not yet. You have forgotten something.

You have spoken of the man you wounded yesterday, but not of the one you fought and bound. It is he who has gone free, isn't it, to fetch his comrades ? ”

“ Yes, but I did not mean to tell you. How did you guess ? ”

“ From what you said before you—before we fetched the side-saddle.” She smiled as she changed the phrase. “ When you would not answer the question, which I tried to force you to answer.”

“ Mademoiselle is very quick-witted.”

“ And Burgwan can be very obstinate,” she retorted ; and I smiled in my turn.

“ The fellow was set free by my men, but I do not think he can get back in time to do any harm.”

“ And why have your men deserted you ? ”

“ They were not bound to remain with me.”

“ Then the desertion had nothing to do with me ? ”

“ Yes, I told you we quarrelled about you. But I wish to see our course ; will you let me study the map ? ”

“ Yes, if you will assure me that their desertion bodes no danger.”

“ Is Burgwan or Mademoiselle in charge of things here ? ”

“ Will Burgwan answer Mademoiselle's question ? Why did those men say there was a price on my head ? ”

“ It was all nonsense, of course.”

“ But I wish to know.”

“ They said you had done something or other, and that they were to be paid handsomely for getting you to Maglai.”

“ Do you know what they said ? ”

“ Yes—that you had committed some crime.”

“ Some crime ! ” she cried, in quite indignant astonishment. Then she laughed scornfully. “ Do you believe it ? ”

“ No. If I did, it would make no difference.”

“ A criminal ! With a price on my head ! What can it mean ? ” This was more to herself than to me,

so I plunged into a study of the map, and in a few minutes had made out a part of the route we should have to go.

"I am no criminal, Burgwan," she said, breaking in suddenly on my study of the map.

"I didn't need to be told. This is the way we shall have to go at first"; and I drew her attention to the map.

While we were examining it, Chris grew restless, and at length got up and stood sniffing the air and the ground and listening.

"Some one is about," I said, as I folded up the map and put it in my pocket. "Will you go into the hut, Mademoiselle? It may be the guide Georgev—or it may not; and may mean trouble of some sort. Take Chris with you and shut the door. He'll answer for any one who tries to bother you. Chris, inside; on guard, good dog."

He understood and obeyed at once.

I strolled halfway to the tent and called to Karasch, who came out.

"I think some one is coming up the ravine, Karasch. It may be Georgev, or some of the men in search of Mademoiselle yonder. You mean to stand by me?"

"On my oath, yes. But if they are in search of her, you'd better give her to them, Burgwan."

"Stop that fool talk, and leave everything to me; and do exactly as I tell you."

Then I heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and I lit a cigar and sat down to wait for the riders. There were three of them, and the first glance showed me Georgev was not among them. I sat smoking until they rode up, then I rose slowly.

"Are you the new men hired by the guide, Georgev?" I asked.

"No," answered one who appeared to be the leader. "Is there a man named Karasch here?"

"What do you want?" I asked.

"An answer to my question. This is the place, sure enough," he said, turning to his companions. "The tent and the hut"; said he nodded toward each. "You're Karasch, by your description," he said to Karasch. "Where's the prisoner?"

"I'm in charge here. Put your questions to me," I broke in, brusquely.

Resenting my tone, he looked at me more sharply than before, and then laughed.

"I know you. You must be the man who rescued our prisoner yesterday and shot Drago. You'll answer for that, I promise you; but I don't want any trouble. Your other men are on our side, you know."

"The man I shot lies in the tent there with a broken leg. The prisoner you seek is in the cottage."

"That's better," he cried, with a sneering laugh. "You know when your're beaten, I see."

I shrugged my shoulders as if indifferent.

"We're only two here, and Karasch has a broken arm. So you're not likely to have much trouble."

"Where are the others?" he asked, suspiciously, as if half fearing an ambush. "There were five of you."

"One, Andreas, lies out on the hills somewhere, hurt riding after your comrade in the night. Petrov and Gartski have gone to Lalwor, the hill village yonder, seeking help to take the prisoner."

"You'll have to come with us."

"That's as it may be. But we've no horses. Your fool of a man killed ours last night, so that we shouldn't get away until you returned. But he didn't expect you so soon."

"Nor did you, I expect. We came upon our comrade on the hills by chance this morning too ill even to put a leg across a horse. It's all that devil's work. He wishes he'd had no hand in the black business, I can tell you. And so will you."

"You can take her as soon as you like—the sooner the better. She's caused enough trouble here," I an-

swered, and putting my cigar between my lips I sat down again and lolled back as if in lazy indifference.

But my indifference was not even skin deep. My object was to make them confident that there was no sort of resistance to be expected, and every nerve and sense in me was on the alert. I was making a kind of corner in risks just then, and should need all my wits to avoid being squeezed.

I was already fully resolved to use the three horses thus fortunately brought within my reach, and my first step was to get the present riders off their backs. The second would be to keep them off ; and the third to put Mademoiselle, myself, and Karasch in their places.

The three men spoke together a moment and then the leader dismounted, handed the reins of his horse to one of the others, and came toward me.

"I dare say you mean to act all right and give up the prisoner," he said, bluntly ; "but while we stay here I'm going to make sure you can't play any trick upon us by tying your hands behind you. Stand up."

As he spoke he signed to the other two, who levelled their guns point blank at me.

It was a wholly unexpected turn and seemed to spell crisis. Not seeing for the moment what to do, I made no effort to rise, and he repeated his command.

"Get up," he cried this time with an oath. "We've no time to waste over you."

CHAPTER VI

A FIGHT FOR THE HORSES

I MET the man's bullying look and glanced from him along the barrels of the guns which his companions held pointed at me ; and then sat up.

"I don't see the necessity for it," I said, quietly.

"No, but I see it, and mean to do it. Get up at once, or you may find it difficult ever to rise again," he said, savagely.

I scrambled up leisurely, dropping my hand into the

pocket where I had my revolver, and my fingers closed on it as I held it ready to shoot without drawing it out.

"Turn round," he ordered.

"Wait a moment," I said quite coolly. "If you do this, how am I to know you'll set me free again when you go?"

"Do as I tell you," he cried savagely with another oath.

"No, by God, no."

This was from Karasch, very loudly and angrily spoken, and the man turned from me to him.

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. This was my doing from the first. I set your man free to go and find you and bring you here; but this shan't be done."

The interruption was very timely, and I took advantage by it to edge away until I was sheltered from the guns by the leader's body.

"What Karasch says is right enough. But you need not say any more, Karasch. There won't be any more talk about binding me or any one else."

"By the Cross, but there will!" cried the leader fiercely, and was turning to give an order to his companions when I gripped him by the shoulder and held him.

"Don't move. You're just in the line between those two guns and me, and I can talk all the more comfortably while you stay there." Karasch laughed, and the man tried in vain to wriggle out of my grip. "I'm covering you all the time with my revolver, and if you get away I shall shoot. You've been a deal nearer death all the while than you thought," and I showed the ugly little muzzle above the edge of my pocket.

The argument carried conviction. He ceased to struggle, and changed colour.

"Tell those men of yours to throw their guns on the ground."

He hesitated, and I showed him a bit more of my pocket argument.

"I'm accustomed to be obeyed pretty quickly. Ask Karasch there," I said, drily. Karasch laughed again and swore.

The leader shouted the command over his shoulder, and after some demur it was obeyed.

"Go and pick the guns up, Karasch, and get this man's from his horse, and bring them to the tent," I said, and waited while he fetched them.

Then I took my hand from the leader's shoulder and stepped back.

"Now we shall all breathe a little more freely. You see the kind of soft fool you've got to deal with in me now, and you won't make any more mistakes of this kind. Now we'll go to the tent, to hear your errand."

"Give us our prisoner, and we'll go."

"But Karasch and I wish to go with you, and I want to explain to you the little difficulty your man has put in the way. Come."

"I don't want to go there."

"If you'd rather go straight to hell, you can," I exclaimed, fiercely. "Choose and be quick about it."

"I'll come," he said sullenly.

"You can tell your men there we're going to talk, and that they may as well bait their horses. We may be some time."

He was getting to be quite an apt pupil. He turned and gave the order, and the two men stepped from their saddles and growled to him to make haste.

I led him round the tent to the shed where the three dead horses lay.

"Last night your man killed them. You see, there are three of them."

"Well?"

"Well, there are three dead ones here, killed by your men, and there are three live ones out there on which you have just ridden up."

"You don't mean—what do you mean?" he asked. He was beginning to understand.

"How do you propose to make up that loss to me?" He laughed uncomfortably. "You're a cool hand," he said.

"I'm cool enough just now," I returned drily; "and none the safer on that account, perhaps, to fool with. How are you going to replace those three horses?"

"Speak out, and to hell with you," he growled.

"I propose an exchange, that's all. You can have these, and I'll take yours and cry quits."

His face was a study; rage battling with the conviction of helplessness as he glared at me.

"You are three to two, I know; but we're well armed, and you have nothing but your knives. I could put a bullet into you at this minute just as easily, and much more surely than your men could have shot me a while since."

He started, and I saw his hand go stealing to his sash.

"I shouldn't draw it if I were you," I said quietly.

He took the advice and stood thinking in sore perplexity.

Then I made my first mistake.

"I'll treat you fairly. I shall pay you for the horses, and will send you a couple of hundred gulden for each of them, good Austrian money."

His eyes lighted; and I read it for a sign of avarice.

"Six hundred gulden," he said slowly and with gusto.

"Six hundred gulden. It is a large sum of money; but we should be without horses"; and he looked at me cunningly.

"I'll make it a thousand."

"Easy to promise. As easy a thousand as ten."

"What I promise I can do."

"May the Stone of the Sepulchre crush me if I understand," he exclaimed after a pause.

"It may help you to decide if I remind you I can take the horses without even promising a single gulden."

"And about the prisoner?"

"She goes with me."

"Why?"

"Because she prefers to."

"So that we lose the payment for her as well as our horses."

"How much were you to be paid?"

He paused as if in doubt how much to ask.

"Five hundred gulden each. There are six of us."

He watched me closely as he named the amount.

"Three thousand gulden! She must be a prisoner of importance. Who is she?"

"It's a long road to Maglai and a difficult."

"That doesn't answer my question. Your man told mine she was a witch." He laughed.

"So we were told. Any tale was good enough to listen to at that price. We can't talk so glibly about hundreds and thousands of gulden as you can."

"Then you don't think she is a witch?"

"I believe what I'm paid to believe—if the pay is high enough. And no one would pay such a sum for a mere witch."

"I'll pay you the three thousand gulden and the six hundred as well, if you let me have the horses quietly, and tell Karasch what you told me, that the prisoner is no witch."

He laughed again, and with sudden change to earnest he shot a sharp look at me and asked—

"How will you pay? Who are you to have such a sum?"

"No matter who I am. I will send you the money to any place and in any way you name."

"Horses are horses, and I know who is to pay for the prisoner when we get to Maglai."

"And I'll increase the price four thousand gulden if you give me the name of the man who has employed you."

"I'd like to serve you, if you really had money to throw away like that."

"I'm paying to avoid trouble and to gain information ;

but I mean to have the horses in any case. You can choose."

He paused to think again.

"You must be very rich. If I thought you'd pay, I'd do it."

"You can take my word."

"You don't look it," he said doubtingly, and with an accent of regret.

"I'm through with the talk. Choose," I answered, shortly.

"I'm ready to risk it, but I must speak to the others."

"That's right enough. You can do that; but you must bring the horses up to the side of the tent first."

I let him go in front of me round the tent, and he called to his companions to lead the horses over to us. Karasch met them half-way, and he and I tethered them while the three men held a discussion.

I told Karasch what had passed, emphasizing what the leader had said about the prisoner being no witch.

"But you said she had put a charm over your life, Burgwan."

"Because I saw you were set on killing her. She is no witch, but a prisoner of great importance. They are to have three thousand gulden for taking her to Maglai."

"Three thousand gulden!" he cried, his eyes wide at the thought of such a sum. To him it was a fortune.

"Would any one pay so much for a witch, Karasch?"

He shook his head.

"The man may be lying."

I called to him, and he came and confirmed what he said to me so stoutly that Karasch was convinced.

"Are you agreed yet?"

"There would be no difficulty if we were sure of you. Can he pay such a sum as four thousand florins?" he asked Karasch, nodding his head toward me.

"It is a big fortune," was the answer, with a shrug of the shoulders. "But what he promises he always does."

Not a very convincing banker's reference that at the best ; and the leader shook his head.

"That's the point. It's only a promise," he said, slowly, with a shake of the head. "Have you got any of it here to give us now?" The question was asked casually enough, as if it were no more than the occasion warranted ; but I saw more than that in it.

"I've told you I'd pay you afterwards. That's the last word."

"I'll try what I can do then" ; and with that he went back to his companions, and the earnest conference was resumed.

"I don't trust him," said Karasch.

"Let us get away quietly with the horses, and we'll trust to ourselves, Karasch," said I.

The three men had now apparently ended their conference, and the leader came across to me.

"Two of us are agreed," he said, as he reached me, "but one will not without proof. Let me see our comrade whom you shot. He must have a voice in it too."

"He is in the tent here," I answered. We entered it, and he went and knelt by the wounded man.

I did not trust him any more than did Karasch, and, although I noticed nothing to rouse my suspicions, I watched the two closely, and kept my hand on the revolver in my pocket, and told Karasch to watch the two outside.

So far all had gone as well as I could have wished. We had the horses under our hands, and the men were divided so that we could deal with them in turn should they attempt to put up a fight.

Such a thing seemed far from their thoughts, moreover. From the snatches of talk I heard, the leader appeared to be arguing with his comrade, urging him to agree, and answering the objections which he raised. Words began to run high between them presently, and at length the leader cursed the other volubly for a fool and got up.

"I can do nothing with this pig," he exclaimed angrily to me.

"You must settle your own matters, and be quick about it," I returned sharply.

I was getting very anxious now on account of made-moiselle. She had been shut up in the cottage all the time, and knowing nothing of what was passing between the men and me it was easy to guess the effect which so trying a suspense would have upon her.

"What can I do? He vows that if I yield to you he will denounce me at Belgrade—idiot, pig, and fool that he is," he cried furiously, pacing the floor and throwing his hands about. "We are equally divided now, two to two."

"The money I shall pay would be a fortune for the two who help me. The others would have no part in earning it, and no right to share it. Two thousand gulden, you know."

He had passed me, and at the words turned and stood looking at me with an expression of consummate cunning.

"You are the devil to tempt a man," he muttered.

"Give me your help in this, and I'll make your share three thousand," I said, in a low tone.

"Three thousand gulden," he murmured under his breath. "Three thousand gulden for myself."

"And you shall have the horse we have and come with us as guide to where we wish to go. You know the country?"

"Every yard of it. Three thousand gulden!" He murmured it almost caressingly, like a man dazed at the prospect of such riches. "I'll do it," he exclaimed, and threw up his hand. "You'll swear on the cross to pay me?"

He made a couple of steps toward me as he spoke, and I stepped back, not wishing him to come too close.

"Now," he cried, and sent up a great shout.

There was a guttural sound behind me, and the next

instant I felt the burning sting of steel in my flesh as the wounded man thrust a knife into my leg with a force and suddenness that made me stagger ; a clutch on my coat followed, which upset my balance and drew me back all a-sprawl across him.

Only by the narrowest chance did I escape death then—the chance that in falling I so hampered the man that he could not deliver the second thrust for which he had already lifted his knife. He struck at me, but missed his aim. I was out of his reach before he could strike again, and with a heavy kick I put his arm out of action and sent the knife flying across the tent while I shouted for Karasch.

It was all the work of an instant, and I was barely on my legs before the leader rushed at me. My fingers were closed on my revolver.

“ Throw your hands up, or I'll put a bullet into you,” I cried.

He stood a second as if weighing the chances, and then from outside came the noise of trouble. The crash of breaking wood, a cry from the girl, the savage growl of Chris, and an angry shout in Karasch's deep voice.

It was almost the last thing I knew of that fight.

Maddened by the sounds I sprang to rush from the tent, when the wounded man, resourceful daredevil as he was, made his last effort and flung his rug right at my face.

The last thing I saw was the leader springing toward me with his uplifted club ; I fired at him ; and the same moment a blow on the head finished the fight, and I went down stunned and senseless.

CHAPTER VII

ESCAPE

MY first conscious sensation after the blow felled me was as singular as it was unpleasant. I seemed to be nothing but one huge head on which a hundred invisible smiths were hammering with quick, rhythmic

blows, each of which gave me such excruciating pain that I yearned to cry out to the impish torturers to cease, but was tongue-tied and helpless.

After a time the throbbing sensation decreased in violence ; but while the sharpness of the pain of each throb was less, it lasted longer, producing a deadening sickening ache, which was equally intolerable.

Next I felt something touch my hand with a curiously restless movement. The thing was sometimes cold and damp, and at others warm and clinging, with a touch now and then of roughness. I tried to draw my hand away, but found it heavier than the heaviest metal, so that I could not stir even a finger. I shrank from the thing and shuddered ; it filled me with a sense of uncanny horror ; and it appeared to be many long hours to me before I found that it was Chris, nosing and licking me and rubbing his head against my hand.

I can recall to this day the rush of relief which this discovery produced. If Chris was by my side, all must be well. Just that one vague thought, without any other conscious connexion, followed by a sensation of calm peaceful comfort.

I think I passed from semi-insensibility then into sleep, for when I became conscious again, I was much better. I was no longer all head ; I could move my hand to touch Chris, who still kept his watch over me ; and I heard his little whimper of pleasure at my caress, as he took my fingers in his great mouth to mumble them, as his manner was when very demonstrative of his affection.

But I was content to lie quite still and soon afterwards another and very different set of sensations were started.

Some one came to my side, a fairy touch smoothed the pillow under my head, a gentle, cool hand was laid on my burning forehead, deft, quick fingers light as gossamer removed the bandage on my head and bathed it with water of deliciously refreshing coldness.

I heard a pitying sigh from tremulous lips as the some one bent over me ; I caught whispered words. " It was for me " ; and just when I was striving to open my eyes the lips were pressed swiftly and gently on my brow.

It did more to soothe me, that one swift, gentle touch, than all the waters of all the coldest rivers in the world could have done ; and although I felt like a guilty hypocrite, I kept my eyes closed and my limbs still in eager hope that another dose of the same elixir might be administered.

But at the moment I heard some one approach. It was Karasch.

" It is not safe for you to stay any longer," he said. " I came to tell you."

The words opened the floodgates of my memory to all that had occurred. I had forgotten everything ; but in a moment I understood.

" I told you I should not leave him, Karasch."

" He would wish it, I know. Your safety comes first with him."

" Come where we can speak without fear of disturbing him," was the reply ; and then I was left alone with Chris.

I opened my eyes and looked about me, remembering things. I was in the tent close to where I had fallen and they had brought the bed from the cottage and placed me on it. I looked about for the wounded man who had been the cause of my undoing, but he was not there. Everything else was as it had been before the trouble ; and I wondered what had happened.

" Good Chris, old dog," I said, putting out my hand to pat him. He barked, not very loudly, but the sound jarred my head with such a spasm of pain that I hushed him ; and as I was doing so, Mademoiselle and Karasch came hurrying back.

" You are better, Burgwan ? " she asked.

" What does it all mean ? " I asked. " I remember

I had a crack on the head." I lifted my head, though it took all I knew not to wince at the pain it cost me, and put my hand to it.

"We will tell you everything presently. You mustn't talk yet. You are not strong enough."

"Tell me now. I am all right"; but I was glad to yield to her hand and lay my head down again.

"Where are those men?"

"All is well. You may be perfectly at ease," she said, soothingly.

"What time is it?"

"It is afternoon."

"The same day?"

"Yes, the same day. You have been unconscious from that blow on the head. I am so glad you are better. But you must sleep."

I looked across at Karasch, who was staring at me with trouble in his eyes.

"Did we keep the horses?" I asked him; but Mademoiselle replied.

"Yes. All is well. You can rest in perfect safety."

Karasch started to say something, but she checked him with a glance and a gesture.

"Any news of Petrov or Gartski?" I asked him; and again she gave the answer for him.

"They will give us no trouble now, none at all," she said, with gentle firmness. "You can rest quite assured."

Again Karasch wanted to speak and again she stopped him just as before with a glance and a quick gesture. I understood then.

"I want to speak to Karasch alone," I said.

"No, you must not speak to him yet. There will be plenty of time when you are better. Go away, Karasch."

He lingered in hesitation and looked at me; and she repeated her words dismissing him.

"Yes, go, Karasch, and saddle the horses. And come and report the moment you are ready."

"Burgwan! You are mad," cried Mademoiselle.

"No, I am just beginning to be sane again. Go, Karasch"; and without any more he left the tent.

"You must not attempt such folly. I will not go."

"You'll find it both lonely and unsafe alone here then."

She smiled at that, but tried to frown.

"That is just like you. But you will not take this risk. You are not fit to move from where you are."

"Fit or unfit, I'm going. I read Karasch's meaning in his looks when you wouldn't let him put it in words."

"Don't attempt this, Burgwan. Please, please don't," she cried with such sweet solicitude for me and such complete indifference to her own danger that I could not but be deeply moved.

"What would happen if Petrov or Gartski got back with a crowd? I'm not strong enough just yet to do any more fighting, but I am strong enough to run away. And run away I'm going to."

"It may kill you," she murmured, despondently.

"Not a bit of it. I am getting stronger every moment. See, I can sit up"; and I sat up and tried to smile as if I enjoyed it, although my head seemed almost to split in two with the effort.

"You need rest and sleep—you must have it."

"I can sleep in the saddle. I'm an old hand at that."

"But the jolting—oh, no, no, you shall not."

"The jolting won't hurt me. I'm a bit weak, of course, but fit enough to ride."

"Burgwan! You are going to do this madness for me."

"No, no," I said again. "I am just running away because I'm afraid of what may happen to me if I stay until Petrov and the other fools get here."

"Let me go by myself then."

"And desert me?" She lifted her hands with a glance of protest and the colour rushed to her cheeks.

"I will go and see if Karasch is ready," she added, and hurried away.

Then I threw back the rug, rolled off the bed, and got

on my feet. I was abominably weak. My brain swam with every movement I made, so that the place whirled about me until I must have nearly fainted. My leg was stiff and painful where that treacherous brute had run his knife into me. I remember looking at the bed with a sort of feverish longing to get back on to it almost impossible to resist as I clung to the tent pole to steady myself and let my head clear.

"It's got to be done, Chris, old man," I said to the old dog, who was standing by me; and after a struggle resolution lent me strength, and I ventured at length to do without the support of the pole and began to limp slowly and painfully up and down. If there had been no one but myself to think about I should have given in and just lain down again to let happen what might.

But the thought of Mademoiselle's danger was tonic enough to keep me going; and when I heard Karasch outside, I managed to crawl to the opening of the tent to meet them.

"We are ready, you see, Chris and I," I said.

Mademoiselle said nothing, but the look in her eyes was full of sweet sympathy and deep anxiety.

"I'm afraid I don't look very fit," I murmured. I must have cut a sorry figure, indeed, I expect; my clothes rough and torn, begrimed with dirt and smeared here and there with blood, my head swathed in a bandage, and my face pale to whiteness above and blackened below with my sprouting beard.

"I wish you could laugh at me. It would do me a power of good."

"Laugh! Burgwan!" she said, her lips trembling. She put out her hand. "Let me help you. Lean on me."

"As if I wanted any help," I laughed, and making an effort, I started toward the horse I was to mount, only to stagger badly after half a dozen steps. In a moment her arm was under mine.

"You see," she exclaimed, in quick distress.

But I laughed. "Coward, to gloat over my fallen pride. I only tripped over something."

"Lean on me," was all she said.

"Are you really fit to travel, Burgwan?" asked Karasch.

"Get me on to the horse. I can ride when I can't walk."

"I think you should stay here," he declared.

"Silence, Karasch," I returned, angrily. My anger was at my own confounded weakness, but I vented it on him. "The air will pull me together."

I started again for the horse and this time reached it, and with Karasch to help me clambered into the saddle, Mademoiselle watched us almost breathlessly.

"Have you got everything, Karasch?"

"Yes. Food, water and arms"; and he pointed to the horse he was to ride, which was well laden.

"I can't help you up, Mademoiselle," I said, with a smile.

I seemed to be the only one of the three who could raise a smile; for she looked preternaturally grave and troubled as she mounted, and Karasch as though he had never known a smile since he was born.

"The map and the compass, you have them?" I asked him.

"I have them," said Mademoiselle.

"Then we can go. Wait, wait," I exclaimed. "I have forgotten something. I must get off."

"What is it?" she asked.

"We must have money. It's in the hut. I must get it."

"You can't go in there," she said, quickly.

"Why not?"

"The men are there."

"The men there?" I repeated dully, not understanding. "What are they doing there?"

"When you were found in the tent we dared not move you, so we brought the bed across to you and put the wounded men in the cottage."

"Yes, of course, you haven't told me yet what occurred. But my money is hidden there and we must have it."

"We'll fetch it if you tell us where to find it."

"Karasch?" I answered, doubtingly.

"You can trust him. I am sure of him," she declared with implied confidence.

"There is more there than he thinks. I'd rather he didn't see it all. Life is one thing, money's another."

"Tell me then. I will get it. He shall go with me to the hut door, but shall not see it."

I told her where to find it and she and Karasch dismounted. I waited on my horse and while they were in the cottage I heard the report of a gun in the distance.

Chris started up at the sound and barked in warning.

"I don't like that thing either, old dog." I didn't; for unless I was too dizzy to guess right, it came from the direction of Lalwor and threatened trouble.

They lingered an unnecessary time in the cottage and every moment was now dangerous; so I rode up to the door and called them. When they came out, Mademoiselle looked scared.

"I must get them some water, Burgwan," she said, as she handed me the money. "I cannot leave them like that. One of them—the one Chris flew at—seems to be dying."

"We dare not stay"; and I told them of the gunshot I had heard. "There will soon be enough here to look after them."

Karasch settled the matter with a promptness which showed what he thought of the news. He threw down the pannikin he carried and shut the door of the hut.

"Come," I said to her; and seeing we were both so earnest, she gave way and we started.

We rode slowly and in silence down the ravine until we reached the mouth of it, and made such speed as we could down the mountain road.

"There's a lot I want to ask; but as the easiest pace

for me is a canter, and as it's the safest for us all just now, we'll hurry. We can talk afterwards," I said when we reached the level; and I urged my horse on until we were cantering briskly, the old dog loping along close to me and looking up constantly as though he was fully conscious that something was very much amiss with me calling for the utmost vigilance and guardianship on his part.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT

WE did not slacken speed until we had put some miles between us and the camp; and although at first I suffered abominable torture from the jolting, I had to keep on, and after a time I found that the rush of the cool air, acting as a kind of stimulating tonic, revived me. My head became gradually less painful and my brain cleared.

It was almost evening when we left the camp, and my intention was to ride as far and as fast as possible while the daylight lasted and then rest until the moon rose. We should then have six or seven hours to ride before even the earliest peasants would be astir, and in that time I calculated we should be able to reach the frontier town of Samac, the terminus of the line.

The overpowering reason for travelling at night was the fear that some attempt would be made at pursuit. If Petrov and Gartski succeeded in bringing any considerable party back to the camp from Lalwor, they would learn from the men there of the reward to be paid for getting Mademoiselle to Maglai; and for any such sum as three thousand gulden the average Bosnian peasant would leave all he had in the world and go scrambling for a share of it. And with greed to back up the superstitious abhorrence of witchcraft, there was no telling what would be done.

"I wish you would rest, Burgwan, if only for an hour," said Mademoiselle as we were walking the horses up a hill.

"Not while the light lasts," I replied. "The fretting impatience to get on would do me more harm than the rest would good. I am in little or no pain now. Tell me what happened after I was knocked over."

"Karasch and Chris saved me. He says the man in the tent with you shouted some signal at which the two who were with him broke open the hut door. Chris flew at them, pinned one man by the throat, and the other, who was close behind, fell in the confusion."

"Good Chris," I exclaimed.

"Yes, indeed, good dog. Well, Karasch, was on the watch and as the man was getting up and drawing his knife to attack Chris, Karasch rushed up and knocked him senseless with a gun."

"Well played, Karasch. And then?"

"That was all, except that I had great difficulty in making Chris loose his hold. His fury was really awful to see. But he obeyed me, and Karasch and I together bound the men and made them prisoners; but both were badly hurt.

"But the third man?" I asked, perplexed.

"We found him shot in the tent, near you."

I remembered then my shot at random just as I was struck.

"Is he dead?"

"No, but badly wounded; and we got him and the man you took last night to the hut."

"Well, it serves them all right; and the folk from Lalwor will look after them. They meant killing me. But it may make things uglier for us, and is all the stronger reason for us to hurry on while the light lasts"; and we pressed forward again.

Just when the gloom was deepening fast, my policy of haste was justified.

I had halted at a point where the road forked and, in considerable doubt which way to ride, was anxiously consulting my map when Chris put his nose to the ground and whimpered.

"Steady, Chris, good dog, steady," I whispered; and he knew he was to make no noise. "Some one is about," I said to Mademoiselle. We sat silent and listened, and presently heard the throbbing of hoofs from the direction we had been riding.

"Two horses," said Karasch, whose hearing was very acute.

"It may be nothing. Ride into the shadow of those trees and let Karasch and Chris go with you," I said to Mademoiselle.

"But you . . ." she began to object.

"Please do as I say and at once," I interposed; and I put my horse on to the grass under another tree.

She did as I asked without further protest and I waited for the newcomers. They caught sight of me while still at some distance and checked their horses first to a trot, and then to a walk.

"You are well come; I have lost my way," I said as they reached me.

"Who are you?" asked one; and as the question was put the other man laughed, and backed his horse to a safe distance as he said—

"It is Burgwan. We are all right;" and I recognized the voice.

"That is Petrov?"

"Yes. You are wanted at the camp, Burgwan, to explain things there. Where is the witch? May the curse of God blight her!"

"If you are the man, Burgwan, you must come back with us," put in the other man, who spoke with an air of authority.

"Must?"

"Yes, must. There are some badly injured men there; and the injured make strange charges against you which must be explained."

"Who are you?"

"I am Captain Hanske, from Lalwor—the head officer of the district under the Imperial Government.

You left the place with an escaped prisoner? She must return with you."

A most disquieting turn, this. Of all developments possible, the least to my liking was a conflict with the Austrian authorities.

"I am prepared to meet any charges," I answered firmly. "An attempt was made upon my life there, and all I did was done in self-defence. But I cannot return with you."

"You have no option. You must do as I say and at once." He spoke in the curt, stern tone of a man accustomed to be obeyed.

"We will see," I answered, in quite as stiff a tone. "I have first a reckoning to settle with Petrov there"; and I wheeled my horse round and rode toward him. But he did not wait for me to get near him. He was off like the wind; as indeed I had hoped.

"I'll carry the news back to the rest at the camp," he called over his shoulder, and he galloped back along the road as though the devil himself were at his heels. I listened to the dying sounds of his horse's hoofs with intense satisfaction, and went back with a laugh to the official.

"Your character as a desperado is well established," he exclaimed dryly and angrily.

"Now we can talk on equal terms," said I, quietly.

"I order you in the name of the Emperor to come with me."

"And I tell you, man to man, I shall do nothing of the kind. I am no desperado, as I shall be easily able to prove when necessary; but I have no time for anything of the sort now."

"Then I shall accompany you."

"No, that also is impossible."

"What were you doing in the camp yonder?"

"My own business, merely."

"Where are you going?"

"Also about my own business."

"Where are your papers?"

"I have none to show you."

"Then I shall accompany you."

"No. That I shall not allow."

"Do you dare to threaten me?"

"There are three roads here. One back to the camp; one to the left there, and one to the right. You are free to choose which you please and I will take another."

"I shall not leave you." He was getting very angry and dogged.

"If you are armed you may perhaps force yourself upon me."

"I shall do as I say," he answered, with just enough hesitation to assure me he was not armed. Then it occurred to me that it would be safer to get him away from the place and to increase the distance between him and the camp. It would be the more difficult for Petrov and the rest to find him when they returned.

"Mademoiselle," I called. She and Karasch came out. "We are to have a companion. This gentleman desires to ride with us. This is our road"; and choosing that which led away to the right, I rode on with her, leaving the official to follow.

She had overheard the conversation and questioned me with some anxiety as to what I meant to do.

"I have my plans. It will all come right. I should have left him at the fork of the road there had I not thought it best to get him further away."

"But I could probably satisfy him," she said.

"I'll deal with him in my own way, please," was my reply.

We plunged along at such pace as we could make now that the darkness had deepened; but when we could go no faster than a walk, and were, I reckoned, some two miles from the cross roads, I called a halt.

"We are going to rest here, captain," I said to him as we dismounted.

We three sat by the side of the road and while we

made a hasty meal I explained my plan to Karasch, who was frankly frightened by the presence of the official.

"The moon will be up in a couple of hours, Karasch, and you must keep watch; I must sleep or I shall not be fit to ride later. We are going to leave that man here. If he dismounts, find the means to turn his horse astray; if he does not, you must disable the horse. The man we shall just tie up to a tree."

"It is dangerous, Burgwan. He is an officer of the Imperial Government," said Karasch.

"If he were the Emperor of Austria himself, I should do it in the plight we are in."

I lay down. The excitement had kept me going; but I was done now; utterly exhausted and worn out; and despite the hazard of our position, I was soon fast asleep. I was awakened by a loud, angry cry from the Austrian, and I scrambled to my feet in alarm.

I must have slept for some three hours; for the moon was up. By the light I saw the man struggling with Karasch and shouting with a vigour that woke very dangerous echoes in the still night. Mademoiselle was holding Chris, who was growling ominously, and she was attempting to still him.

I went over to them and found that Karasch had strapped the man's legs tight together and was holding on to the strap with his one arm while the Austrian was fighting and wrestling to get free.

"Down, Chris. You may loose him, Mademoiselle," I said; and the good dog came instantly to heel. "Stand from him, Karasch," I called next. "Now, sir, you must stop those cries; or I shall put the dog on you."

"This is an outrage, and you shall all suffer for it," he cried, furiously.

"It's done by my orders. The outrage is that you should endeavour to force yourself upon us."

"I am doing my duty. I am a Government——"

"I choose not to believe you; that's all there is to it; and I take you to be a dirty spy set upon me by that

other coward, Petrov, who was with you. I am going to tie your arms to your sides and leave you here."

"You infernal villain . . ." he spluttered.

He ceased to struggle then and let Karasch fasten him up securely; and after that we gagged him, and finding a suitable place some distance from the road we left him.

"Where's his horse?"

"I started him over the hills. Mademoiselle helped me. I couldn't have done it without her. She got him from his horse talking with him, and I got rid of the horse. It'll probably go home."

"It may go to the devil for aught I care. But we must be off without losing another moment."

I felt the necessity now. We had burnt our boats with a vengeance in this treatment of the Austrian captain; and if we were caught on Austrian territory there might be a big bill to pay before we could settle matters. It was not now Mademoiselle's safety only that depended upon our reaching Samac, but our own also, and we pushed on as fast as possible.

"Karasch told me how cleverly you got that man separated from his horse, Mademoiselle," I said when we were walking the horses up a steep hill.

"He did not hear what I said to him?" she asked, quickly.

"He said nothing to me if he did."

"He deserves what he has got; but it is a dangerous thing in Bosnia to interfere with an Austrian official."

"What did you say to him?"

"I made the only offer I could. I told him I was the cause of all the trouble, was alone responsible, and offered to explain everything."

"Ah, I see. You mean you offered to go back with him, if he would let you go alone. It was like you."

She started and glanced quickly at me. "I did not say that."

"No. But I know you, and where you are concerned can make a guess."

"You would have been free, Burgwan ; and I could have cleared matters."

"He was a fool, or he would have guessed and accepted the offer."

"What do you mean ? Guessed what ? "

"That the moment I woke I should have ridden back to the camp.' "

"Burgwan ! "

"Do you think I should have left you in the lurch ? It's not the way we treat women in England, or in America."

"But you don't understand. I should have been in no danger. Once under Austrian protection I could have explained."

"Explained what ? "

"Who I am. You have never asked me."

"I do not care. When you wish me to know, you will tell me ; and when I wish to know, I will ask. I can wait. I know what you are—to me."

Either she did not catch the last words, for I had dropped my voice, or she affected not to hear.

When we drew rein at the next hill we walked half way to the top in silence and then she broke it abruptly :

"I will tell you if you wish, Burgwan."

"I do not. To me you are Mademoiselle : to you I am Burgwan ; and Mademoiselle and Burgwan we can best remain, until we are out of this bother."

"How far do you think we are from Samac ? "

"We ought not to be more than a dozen miles at most—but that's not much more than a guess."

"When we reach there, we shall part."

"You will be glad to be on the safe road to Belgrade."

"Is that another guess, Burgwan ? "

"Yes, it's another guess, Mademoiselle."

"Do you think it's a good one ? "

"Yes. You would be an extraordinary woman if it were not. I wish with all my heart we were safely there."

"Then I wish it too," she answered, with a gesture. A long pause followed until she said, "Yes, I do wish it. I had forgotten how ill you are and how sorely you need rest."

"I suppose it sounded as though I was thinking of myself."

"Not to me; you never seem to think of yourself—at least during our comradeship."

"I like that word—comradeship. Thank you for it."

"It has been a strange one, Burgwan. How good you have been. And I took you at first for a—a peasant, and even once for a brigand."

"There are worse folk in the world than peasants—or brigands either for that matter."

"What trouble I have brought to you."

"We shall have the more to laugh over when we meet again."

"We shall not meet again, Burgwan," she said, so seriously and deliberately that I thought I could detect a touch of sadness. Perhaps I only hoped it, and the hope cheated me. I answered lightly:

"One never knows. The world's a small place now. You might come to America some day."

"No, no. That is impossible," she interjected quickly.

"Then I might go to Belgrade."

"No, no," she exclaimed again in the same quick tone. "That too must be impossible."

"Impossible is a word we are going to wipe out of the American dictionary," I replied, with a smile. "We shall see; but as we are at the top of the hill we'll hurry on to Samac—the first stage, whether for America or Belgrade."

She turned as if to say something, her face very grave and earnest, but after a moment's hesitation shook up her reins and we cantered on.

But a good deal was to happen before we reached Samac; the first stage, as I had so glibly named it. We had some few miles of easy going when the path became

very difficult and branched off suddenly in three directions. I picked out that which, judging by the compass, promised to lead us straight to Samac. But instead of that, when we had followed it for an hour or more we found it cut by a broad, swift-flowing river.

The path led right down to the water's edge and rose from it on the other side ; but the river was in flood from the recent heavy rains, and the ford was impassable. Karasch and I both tried to cross, on horseback first and then on foot, but failed ; and then we rode along the bank searching for a fordable spot.

But this only led us into worse disaster. We came to a spot where another stream, itself as fierce and swift and broad, joined the first. We were cut off hopelessly.

We had lost precious hours in this way. It was long past the dawn ; and to make matters even worse I could find no trace of the streams on the map anywhere near Samac.

It was an awkward plight in all truth. To go on was impossible ; to stay where we were for the waters to subside was useless ; and yet to go back was only to put ourselves once more on the road where we might look for danger from those we knew to be in pursuit of us. The hours we had thus wasted had thrown away all the advantage gained by the night's riding.

Yet there was nothing else for it ; and with a bitter sigh and something stronger at the bad luck, I gave the word, and we started to return.

CHAPTER IX

FROM BAD TO WORSE

THE crushing disappointment and the anxiety it caused, following on the fatigue of the long ride, aggravated the injury to my head so that I could scarcely keep in the saddle. Suddenly my brain commenced to whirl and I remembered no more.

When I came to myself Mademoiselle was bathing my face and head, deep pity and care in her eyes.

"I'm horribly ashamed of myself," I murmured.

"You feel better now?"

"Oh, yes. I can sit up. Was I long?"

"Only a few minutes. Karasch has tethered the horses and is getting us something to eat. Do you know, I was never so hungry in my life before?" and she laughed brightly.

"We're in a desperate mess," said I, gloomily.

"Whatever the result, I'm not going to put my foot in the stirrup again until you have had something to eat and have slept for at least two or three hours."

"You have a very masterful way of your own."

She nodded and smiled to me.

"Here's breakfast at any rate," she cried, as Karasch came up.

"Put it down here, Karasch, and get one of the saddles to prop Burgwan up."

"I can sit up without anything, I assure you."

"Who did you say was masterful?"

I gave in with a smile and a shrug of the shoulders and let them arrange the saddle, and found it very comfortable.

It was poor fare. Some hard biscuits, a tin of preserved meat, and some water from the river; but it could not have been enjoyed with more relish if it had been the best breakfast that the Waldorf-Astoria chef could have sent up.

Mademoiselle's cheerfulness in the strange and depressing circumstances was positively dauntless. She would see nothing but the brightest side of things. We were lost on the hills; but then it would be so much the more difficult for any one to find us. The food was rough, but we had plenty to last us for all that day and part of the next. The loss of time might be dangerous, but we all needed rest and could take it without risk where we were. We did not know where to look for the road to Samac, but we should be sure to find a way somewhere. And meanwhile we were

getting stronger and so better able to face the trouble.

Even Karasch's stern face relaxed under her influence. And as for me—well, I rolled over on the soft grass when she told me, and having put old Chris on the watch, went off to sleep as contentedly as though her view of the position and not mine were the true one.

I slept soundly.

When I awoke I was alone to my great surprise. The horses were grazing near me tethered ; but even Chris was away somewhere ; and I sat up wondering in some confusion what it meant.

A glance at my watch showed it was two hours and more past noon and that I must have slept for six or seven hours. I felt immensely refreshed. The pain in my head was so slight as to be inconsiderable, and although my leg was stiff, I could move about freely.

Feeling in my pockets I found a couple of cigars in my case, and lighted one to think over things. I was smoking it with rare relish when I saw Mademoiselle coming from the direction of the river with Chris in close attendance. How the old rascal had taken to her ! I went to meet them ; and as I approached, the dog came running to fawn upon me and then rushed back to fawn upon her ; and looked from one to the other of us as though our comradeship, as she had termed it, was just the loveliest thing in the world to him.

"Chris seems to approve of our comradeship, Mademoiselle," I said, marvelling how on earth she managed to look so fresh and sweet after her rough-and-tumble experiences during the last forty hours.

"He has been with me to the river on guard. I had no idea it was so difficult to wash in a river, and to do one's hair out of doors and without a glass."

"You have been very successful. You put me to shame sadly," and I glanced down in dismay at myself. "And you are so bright and sunny."

"There is good news. Our luck has turned. Karasch found a peasant who was crossing the hills and is learn-

ing from him our route. They are on the hill yonder."

"Thank God for that," I said fervently.

"Yes, I suppose it is good news," she replied in a tone which made me glance quickly at her. Then she added, after a pause: "You look much better for your rest, Burgwan."

"I feel a different man."

We reached the spot where we had rested, and sat down to wait for Karasch.

"I have been thinking this morning," she said, slowly.

"We all have some thinking to do before we are out of our plight."

"You call this a plight," and she smiled. "Why, see what a lovely wild country it is. I could live in these hills—live, I mean, in the sense of keen, rare enjoyment."

"I should like some clean clothes," I put in, flippantly.

"Don't." And she gestured and frowned. "I want you to feel what it must be to me, and then to think, as I was thinking a while since, what would have been my fate—if it had not been for you. And you call this a plight! It is like Heaven in comparison!"

"I don't want you to exaggerate what I did."

"I am not exaggerating it," she replied deliberately. "I don't. I could not. You risked your life for me and saved me. Could I exaggerate that, Burgwan? Can I ever repay it."

She was so earnest in the desire to make me feel her gratitude and looked at me with such sweet graciousness, that I came within an ace of telling her how she could repay me. The very words rushed to my lips only to be stayed by an effort as I dropped my eyes before her. I could not speak of this while she was still dependent upon my help.

"What a long time Karasch is," I said clumsily after a long pause, not knowing indeed what else to say.

I felt her eyes still upon me. She made a slight gesture of dissatisfaction and her voice had an accent of resentment.

"You are anxious to get to your clean clothes and all that they stand for—in exchange for this."

"You are not content with this?"

"I could be," she murmured with a sigh.

"I don't understand you."

"No. I suppose not. You haven't the key."

"You can have no reason to be afraid to go back to Belgrade. I know that, because at the camp you were so anxious to start. Your sighs then were of discontent because you couldn't start at once."

"You remember?" She smiled slowly, and then grew serious. "No, it is not exactly fear, and yet—I suppose in a way it is fear. It is certainly reluctance. Oh, I see what you mean." She broke off, smiling very brightly this time. "That there may be some reason connected with the cause of my capture which threatens me: that I have committed some offence or——"

"No, no, I don't think anything of the sort," I interposed.

"No, I'm not a criminal, not even a political criminal, Burgwan—and not even a witch." The smile became a free joyous laugh, and I joined in and laughed also.

"I'm not so sure about the witchcraft, Mademoiselle."

"If I were a witch I should know all about you and I—yes, I should like to, and yet I would rather not. We can be so frank while you are just Burgwan. It is all so strange, this comradeship of ours. I shall never forget it. Shall you—even when you get to those clean clothes that are so much in your thoughts?"

"I'm not likely to change my thoughts even when I change my clothes."

"What a time Karasch is," she laughed, throwing back my own words at me. "Keeping you from the tailor and the barber in this way!"

"He is keeping you from Belgrade—a much more serious matter."

"I don't mind that—and yet I suppose I ought to. But this is so delightful," she cried, joyously.

"This?"

"This delicious freedom. This utter irresponsibility. This Burgwan and Mademoiselle comradeship. How I wish I was just no more than a peasant girl! Oh, it is life."

"There are plenty of them who would be glad to change places with you."

"Yes, I know I am talking nonsense, and I dare say I should grow tired of it all in a week or a month. Besides, there might be no Burgwan like you and no Chris in the picture, to feel safe with and trust. I couldn't do with only Karasch, could I?"

"He is a very good fellow, and might make a very good husband."

"Oh, don't, please. Now you've shattered the dream, and made me wish for Belgrade and my friends."

Did she mean all I was ready to read into that sentence? Was it intended as a warning lest another than Karasch should presume? I was glad I had held my tongue just before. When I did not reply, she stooped and patted the dog and then laughed.

"I wish you were my dog, Chris," she said. "I shall get one just like him and call him Chris."

"Would you like to change masters, Chris?" He drew himself lazily across the grass at my words and thrust his nose into my hand almost as if understanding my question and answering it. "I will give him to you if you like, Mademoiselle."

But she shook her head. "No. No, no, no," she cried.

"Why not?"

She called him back to her side and caressed him before she answered, and then spoke very slowly.

"I don't think I know why. I would rather have him than anything in the world, but I couldn't take him. I—I couldn't bear to have him, I think."

"You may change your mind when you see him next time." She bent over him again and patted him and let him lick her hand.

"I am afraid I know what you mean, Burgwan—that you think of coming some day to Belgrade. I hope you never will."

"Why?"

"It is so difficult to explain. Here we are Burgwan and Mademoiselle; and there—well, for one thing, you would have your clean clothes," and she broke off with a smile partly quizzical and partly of dismay; and then added: "You would look for Mademoiselle and would only find . . ." she finished with a shake of the head.

"You think I should be disappointed?"

"You must not come, Burgwan. There would be no Mademoiselle in Belgrade."

"Chris may wish to see his successor. He is a masterful dog, you know," I said with a smile.

"This is no jest, Burgwan. I wish you would promise me not to come there. Ah, here comes Karasch. Promise me, Burgwan"; and in her eagerness she leant across and laid a hand on my arm, the earnestness of her manner showing in her eyes.

"I cannot promise," I answered.

She drew her hand away with a gesture of impatience and said, as she rose: "That is not like Burgwan. The very mention of Belgrade has changed you."

"Not changed me. I have always meant to go," I replied. As I got up Karasch reached us, and there was no chance to say more.

He explained that the peasant had been pointing out the way to him and was willing to lead us to the proper road.

The horses were saddled at once and when they were ready, I went to Mademoiselle, who had been standing apart gazing at the rugged scenery with intense enjoyment.

"Are we ready, Burgwan?"

"Yes; we may start now."

"I am almost sorry, I think," she said, looking about her wistfully. "But it's all over."

"Except the comradeship."

"No, not even excepting that. You will get your clean clothes and I all the conventions once more and—all that they mean. I am ready"; and she sighed.

I helped her into the saddle.

The guide put us in the right road for Samac, which he told us was about fifteen miles distant through a place called Poabja; and as soon as he had left us we rattled over the ground at a sharp canter.

For one thing, I was very uneasy about the Austrian officer whom we had treated so drastically on the previous night. If he was found and liberated, and raised a hue and cry after us there would probably be some very awkward consequences; while if he was not liberated soon, his very life might be jeopardized. My intention was to send a search party after him as soon as we reached a place where that could be done without risk to ourselves; and I was confident that my influence in Vienna was amply sufficient to cause my explanation of the whole affair to be accepted. But I could and would do nothing until I was certain of Mademoiselle's safety.

My anxiety increased when we reached the outside of Poabja; and I kept a vigilant look-out for any signs that the news of our arrival could have preceded us. This was possible, of course. We had strayed so far from the proper road and had stayed so long in the hills that if Petrov and the rest from the camp had followed us to where we had encountered the Austrian, and had continued on the road to Samac, they would pass through Poabja and we might easily run up against some trouble, even without the complication arising out of the official's rough handling by us.

I soon noticed signs which I did not like. We began to meet peasants and others on the road; and I observed that while some of them did no more than stare at us with close scrutiny, others started away and turned their backs and made the sign of the cross as we passed.

Karasch noticed this also ; and when we met a couple of men who behaved in this eccentric fashion, he glanced from the men to Mademoiselle and from her to me.

" Ill news has got ahead of us, Burgwan," he said to me in an undertone. " We had better avoid the town. You saw that sign of the cross ! "

" Go back and question the men."

" Why do we halt ? " asked Mademoiselle, as Karasch rode back.

" We must make certain of the right road," I answered.

" But is not this Poabja ? "

" Yes."

" Then we know we are right. Samac is not half a dozen miles beyond."

Karasch came back wearing an anxious look.

" To avoid the town will cost a couple of leagues. But I think we should take that route," he said.

" Why avoid it ? We have lost our way once," said Mademoiselle.

" We fear trouble. News of our coming is known," I explained.

" Do you mean about the officer who tried to stop us last night ? "

" No—that you are suspected of witchcraft."

She laughed. " I have nothing to fear in Poabja. I will find means to charm their anger into friendship " ; and she settled the question of route by shaking her reins and cantering off toward the straggling little place.

The approach lay up a long, winding hill, steep in places, and as we rode up it the people came out from the houses to gaze at us. Languid curiosity gave way to close interest, and this in turn quickened into some excitement. Men and women walked up the hill abreast of us and some few ran on ahead.

Near the top of the hill stood an inn outside which some half dozen saddle horses were hitched ; and when the riders came hurrying out I was scarcely surprised to

see Petrov among them talking and gesticulating freely to his companions.

Men began to call then one to the other ; the calls were caught up on many sides, at first intermittently but swelling gradually, as the crowd increased, into a coherent cry which I recognized with deep misgivings.

"The Witch ! The Witch ! The Witch !"

I regretted that we had taken the risk ; but Mademoiselle only smiled even when the cries grew louder and more angry and threatening, and hands were raised in imprecations and revilings.

"Forward," I cried. "We must get through them." But to my dismay Mademoiselle hesitated.

Then Petrov and a man with him ran and placed themselves in front of her and made a snatch at her bridle rein. Karasch and I pushed forward.

"Stand back there," I said.

"That she-devil can't pass, Burgwan," answered Petrov.

I stretched forward and tore his grip from the rein and flung him reeling back into the crowd.

A score of hands were raised in menace and the cries of "The Witch ! Death for the Witch !" went up all around us ; while the circle closed in ominously. A stone was hurled and narrowly missed me and then some dirt was thrown at Mademoiselle.

That was more than I was taking. If we were to get through it would have to be by force. So I drew my revolver and called to Karasch to do the same.

"I'll shoot the first man who stops me," I shouted, and for a moment the men fell back before the weapons. "Now is our chance. Gallop for all we're worth and we shall get through."

But the luck was against us. A stone struck Mademoiselle's horse and he reared and plunged and then fell. In a second she was in the grip of half a dozen men and before Karasch and I could dismount and get to her assistance we were separated from her by the crowd and

seized in our turn, the weapons were struck from our hands and we were overpowered.

I was carried into a house close to the inn, my hands and legs were bound and I was thrust into a room and left to curse my folly for having ventured into the place, to brood over the dangers to Mademoiselle, and to breath impotent vows of vengeance against Petrov and every one concerned in our capture.

CHAPTER X

AT POABJA

FOR an hour and more I was left to gnash my teeth in rage as I tore and struggled fruitlessly to loosen the cords that bound me. In that hour I endured the torments such as even hell itself could not have surpassed. My violent struggles inflamed the hurt to my head until it throbbed as if it would split ; but all mere physical pain was lost and deadened in the surpassing agony of mind.

The thought of that sweet, pure girl in the power of these crazy, superstitious fanatics was unendurable ; and had the torture continued longer it would have driven me mad.

At length the door of my room was opened and Petrov and another man entered. The sight of him so maddened me that I strove to rise, bound though I was, to wreak my fury upon him.

"No harm is meant to you, Búrgwan," he said.

My answer was a volley of curses and threats so vehement and furious that he started back in alarm.

"No harm is meant to you," he repeated.

"Loose these cords then, to prove it," I cried.

His companion made as if to approach me when Petrov held him back.

"Not yet," he said, turning pale with fear.

"It doesn't matter when you do it. You know me, Petrov, and now mark this. If I find that the least harm is done to Mademoiselle, I'll make you pay the price. And the price shall be your life. That I swear."

"She is a witch," he said doggedly.

"You lie, you treacherous snake."

"You told me so yourself," he declared sullenly.

"Loose these cords and say that again, and I'll tear your lying tongue out by the roots." I must have been beside myself to talk in this strain; but it had its effect on him.

"She has come to no harm," he said then.

"You may thank your God for that—if it's true."

"It is true," declared the other man. "We came here to set you free."

"Do it then."

"Not while he threatens me," put in Petrov, quickly.

"I know nothing about that. It's the priest's orders."

I pricked up my ears at that, and the great crushing weight of my fears began to lighten.

"Say that again. And tell me what it means," I cried.

"She'll only be taken to Maglai," said Petrov.

"Say that again," I repeated to his companion.

"I don't know what it means. I was told she had confessed to being a witch and asked for the priest, that she might repent and be shriven; and then we were told to come to unbind you."

"Why the devil didn't you say so then, when you came in, and do it at once?"

"You're too violent."

"If all's well with her, you can go to hell your own way." The relief from the strain was so intense I felt almost hysterical with sudden joy, and I lay back and laughed aloud. The two men stood staring at me wonderingly.

"What shall we do?" asked Petrov's companion.

"If you disobey the priest, my good fellow," I interposed, "you'll see what he says to you, and I'll take care that he knows of it."

Instead of replying, they left the room and fastened the door behind them. I didn't care now what they

did. All was well in the matter that had troubled me. Mademoiselle was unharmed and they might do with me as they pleased. I could trust myself to get out of any trouble when once I was in communication with my agents in Vienna.

Then I began to piece things together and to figure out how such a change could have been effected. Mademoiselles herself had found the means of doing it all. I recalled her phrase about charming away the anger of the people at Poabja, and the way in which she had cantered on fearlessly when Karasch and I had counselled the other route to avoid passing through the town. She must have had a strong reason for her confidence. Brave as she certainly was, she would not have faced such a risk voluntarily unless she had had good grounds to know she would pass the ordeal successfully.

Who was she? What influence was she, a Serb of Belgrade, likely to have in that out-of-the-way Bosnian village? On whom was that influence exercised? The man said she had confessed to her witchcraft and asked for the priest that she might repent and be shriven. The priest it was who had ordered my release, and the priest it must be, therefore, through whom she had been able to clear herself.

I was indulging in half a hundred conjectures when the two men entered my room and brought me a note.

"From the priest," said one of them.

But it was not. It was from her.

"All my troubles are over and you may be quite at rest about me. Give your word not to hurt the man Petrov. I ask this. I ask, too, that you will consent to remain where you are for two hours longer. Will you do this—a last favour? For all you have done for me I cannot thank you; I can only remember. Do you think me graceless and a churl if I say our comradeship is over and if I go without seeing you?

I can only say in excuse, I must. To Burgwan from
"Mademoiselle."

"I am taking Chris. I will treat him as what he has been—one of the comrades."

I read the letter two, or three times. It stung me like a blow in the face that she could go like this, without even a touch of hands, or a parting glance.

"You are to give us some answer," said the man who had brought the letter. The two had been watching me in silence during those few distraction-filled minutes. "An answer concerning Petrov here."

"You are safe from me, Petrov," I replied. "I will let you go, but keep out of my way for the future."

"I meant no harm, Burgwan, on my soul none to you. I did what I did for you," he said, and stooped to cut the cords that bound my feet. "I did wrong and am sorry."

He was an idiot, but he couldn't help that; and I let him free my hands.

"Get me some paper," I said, and he hurried away and returned with it. My hands were too numbed from the cords and the efforts I had made to release myself for me to be able to do more than scratch senseless hieroglyphics on the paper. I could scarcely hold the pencil, indeed, and he and the other man chafed them until the blood was set in circulation.

Even after some minutes of this I could only write in large, uncouth letters—a sort of illiterate scrawl which was no more than a caricature of my handwriting. But time was pressing. Mademoiselle might be gone before my letter could reach her, so I wrote as best I could.

"I agree on condition that you see me. Burgwan."

I spelt my name as she had been accustomed to pronounce it; and having sent Petrov to deliver it, I ordered the other man to get me some food and milk.

I had no appetite; but I had eaten nothing for many

hours and knew I must keep up my strength ; so I forced myself to take it. The milk was grateful enough, for I was feverish and consumed with thirst. But all the time I was waiting impatiently for Petrov's return with the answer to my letter ; and as soon as I had finished the meal I paced up and down the low, narrow room feeling like a caged beast.

But my resolve was fixed. She should not go without my seeing her ; and when minute after minute passed and Petrov did not return, I could barely keep within the house, and was seized with a fierce longing to rush off to the priest's house and find her.

At length the suspense and restraint passed endurance, and I went to the door and shouted for some one. The man who had been with Petrov came in response.

" Who is the priest who gave you your orders ? "

" Father Michel. "

" Where does he live ? "

" By the side of his church at the end of the long street. "

" How far is it ? How long should it take to go there and return ? "

" The man should have been back before now. I suppose they have kept him while an answer was written. "

" Who are you ? "

" This is my house. I keep the inn next door. "

" Where is my horse ? "

" Your companion has them all. Karasch is his name, isn't it ? "

I had forgotten all about Karasch in my anxiety.

" Where is he and the horses ? "

" They have been fed in my stables. There's a bill to pay, " he added, as though that was the most important feature in the whole case. I suppose it was to him. I gave him a gold piece and told him to keep the change, and so made a friend.

" Can you lead me to the priest's house ? "

" Of course I can, at need. But I was told you were

going to remain here a couple of hours. It is nothing to me."

"See if Petrov is coming," I said next. His words had recalled Mademoiselle's letter; and I was still anxious to do what she had asked.

He went out and after a minute or two, returned.

"He is coming down the hill now," he announced.

"You can go then."

"I shall be at hand if you want me," he answered, and shut the door behind him.

Petrov came a minute later and had a letter.

I tore it open with trembling fingers.

"Will you wait for me? Mademoiselle."

I breathed a sigh of intense relief, and looking up, caught Petrov's eyes bent upon me. As he met my look he lowered his face.

"You can go," I said, curtly.

"I want to serve you still, Burgwan."

"I have no need for you. Go."

"There is money due to me."

"How much?"

He named a sum and I gave it him, saying that rightfully he had forfeited it by his disobedience. He counted it slowly, as if to make sure it was right.

"I want to serve you still, Burgwan," he repeated.

"I tell you I have no need for you."

"About that Austrian Government officer, Burgwan, Captain Hanske?" It was said with sly suggestiveness.

"Well?"

"Where is he? He stayed with you and has not been seen again. No one but me knows you saw him last."

I laughed.

"Are you threatening me?"

"No. I want to serve you. Is he dead?"

"You insolent dog. No."

"What did you do with him? I've kept my lips closed."

"Closed or open it's all the same to me. Say what you like to whom you like. But get away from here."

"I want to serve you, Burgwan. You can pay. Not only about him, but about that, too"; and he pointed to the letter.

"What the devil do you mean?"

"I was a long time gone, wasn't I?"

"Well?" His manner and tone were full of suggestion.

"I can serve you. I can help you to get those three thousand gulden!"

"Three thousand gulden!" I exclaimed, utterly at a loss for his meaning.

"Yes, the three thousand waiting to be paid at Maglai."

Then I understood and burst into a laugh.

"I think you're making a pretty considerable ass of yourself, Petrov; but I'll listen to you."

"You meant to take her to Maglai, you and Karasch. You knew she was no witch and mean to earn the reward. Well, I can help you now, if you'll give me my share."

My first impulse was to kick him out of the room and I started angrily to obey it; but then a very different thought stopped me. He knew something that I ought to know. He took me for a scoundrel enough to betray Mademoiselle in this way and thought he could sell this knowledge of his at the price of a share in the reward.

"Why were you so long away?" I asked, seizing on the vital point.

"What share am I to have?"

"Half the reward when I receive it."

"You swear that?" he asked slowly.

"Tell me what you know," I cried, sternly.

"Does she say she'll come here?" he asked, pointing again at the note in my hand.

"Yes."

"Ah. She's gone, and if we're to get her into our possession again we shall have to be quick."

"Gone? Where?" I exclaimed, aghast at the check.

He threw up his hands.

"To Samac. But you haven't taken your oath about my share."

"You infernal villain. Do you think I mean to harm her? Out of the way"; and dashing him aside, I called for the other man and told him I must have my horse at once.

Then I turned back to Petrov.

"How long has she been gone?" I asked.

"I shan't say. I've lied to you, Burgwan."

"Here"; and I took out some gold pieces. "These are yours if you tell the truth."

"She's gone on the road to Samac, Burgwan, in a carriage which the priest found for her, and has about half an hour's start. They kept me from coming back to you."

Karasch came up then with his horse and mine, and in a moment I was in the saddle dashing in hot haste up the winding street.

CHAPTER XI

TO SAMAC

MANY of the village folk were still lounging in the street and the clatter of the horses' heels brought out more to gape and stare in wonderment as we clattered past. We were nearing the end of the place when I caught sight of a church with a mean-looking presbytery by the side.

I checked my horse, rode to it, and asked for Father Michel. A tall white-haired priest came out; kind-faced, with remarkable eyes, almost black, under black brows. A man to trust certainly.

"You are Father Michel?"

For answer he turned his searching eyes upon me, paused and said: "You will be Burgwan?"

"Yes. And you know why I come."

"On the contrary, I was in the act of coming to you."

"Is she here?" I did not know how to speak of Mademoiselle; but he understood instantly. He patted my horse's neck and looked up with sympathy in his manner and glance.

"You will let me speak with you?"

"Is she here?" I repeated.

"She wished me to see you. We arranged that she should go and that I should give you her messages. You will come into my house?"

"No, I cannot wait. She is gone to Samac. I shall ride after her. I must see her."

"Yes, she has driven to Samac. There is plenty of time for you to listen to me and then to overtake her before she can leave there."

"She was to come to me," I said, with a glance of doubt at this. It might be another ruse. He saw the doubt instantly.

"You may believe me. I do not wish to detain you if you prefer to go, and should not stoop to a trick." He stepped back and waved his hand as if to signify I was free to go, and added: "It is only for her sake."

He knew the strength such a plea would have for me.

"I must see her. Why did she go in this way?"

"If you do not know I must not tell you. She has gone out of your life altogether—altogether. It is her own doing; her own will and wish and doing. Let her go."

"I will not," I exclaimed almost fiercely.

"Have patience and the strength of a man, Burgwan. You have acted nobly to her, offering your life in her defence. She cannot repay you. She knows that, and I know it. Add chivalry to your courage, and spare her."

"She told me to wait for her—in that letter, I mean; and yet before it was in my hands, she had gone away."

"The sweetest pleasure in life as well as the noblest

quality in man is self-denial, Burgwan; and in your case it is real prudence and wisdom as well."

"But she bade me wait for her," I repeated.

"Not in Poabja, Burgwan. She bade me get from you your name and the means of communicating with you if ever——"

"Then it was a mere trick of words," I cried with angry unreason. "I shall follow her"; and without waiting for him to reply I rode off quickly. I think I was afraid to trust myself longer with him; afraid lest he should prevail with me; afraid lest the fierce consuming desire to look once more upon her face should be chilled by the appeals to my better nature which he knew how to make so shrewdly.

But I was forcing myself upon her in face of her remonstrance and pleading. "Her own will and wish and doing." What was I but a coward to try and force her. The very air took up the cry of coward; and the rhythm of my horse's hoofs seemed to echo it at every throbbing stride.

But I knitted my brows and set my teeth and held on. I must see her again. I would. It was my passion that urged me. I would see her, let the world cry shame upon me for my cowardice. And I dug my heels into my horse's flanks in my distraction and rushed along up hill and down alike at a mad, reckless speed.

A long spell of silence was broken by Karasch.

"Have you thought about that Austrian Government officer, Burgwan?" he asked, with some little evidence of uneasiness.

"Yes, a good deal."

"What are you going to do about it? He can't be left where we tied him up."

"Would you like to go and find him?" I asked, with a grin. It pleased me to tease him in the mood I was in.

"No, not for a fortune."

"Shall we leave him to die then?" I put the question angrily, as if rebuking him for callousness.

"You'd better go yourself," he growled.

"It would be murder to leave him. There will be a big reward offered for his murderers."

"No one knows about it," he growled again, uneasily.

"Oh, yes. Petrov does. He spoke of it in Poabja to me."

"The blight of hell blind him for a cursed pig," he exclaimed with sudden savageness.

"There's not much chance of that before he can say what he knows, Karasch. I mean to leave the country."

He started so violently that he checked his horse, and when he rode up again he looked at me searchingly.

"Are you trying me?" he asked, half fiercely, half in doubt.

"No, that's for the judge to do."

He chewed this answer for a while in gloomy silence; then he uttered one of his quaint oaths into his black beard, and his face cleared.

"There was a time when I should have thought you ready to do even that and worse. I don't now."

That beat me. "Then if I can't fool you I may as well say what I mean to do," I said. "Petrov knows the point where we met last night; and I shall send back to the priest at Poabja enough money to pay for a search party being sent out under Petrov's guidance to find the officer. I marked the spot where we left him and can describe it clearly enough."

"There'll be a pretty mess of trouble when that officer once gives tongue—a hue and cry will be raised for us."

"It will have to be a loud one to reach us. We shall be far enough away by that time."

He pondered this answer in his deliberate way when puzzled; and then lifted his head and looked across at me.

"We?" he asked.

"Didn't I say I should be out of the country?"

"Yes, you did ; but——" he shook his head, doubtfully.

"Did you think I should leave you behind, Karasch ? "

"I couldn't know," he said ; and urging his horse he added : "Shall we get on ? There's Samac in sight."

He rode ahead of me without another word until we were just at the entrance to the town, when he stopped and waited for me. His face was pale and set. He had been thinking earnestly, and was unusually disturbed and nervous.

"You're a man, Burgwan, right to the heart. I can't say how glad I am you beat me in that fight ; and I'd never been beaten before."

"It's all right, Karasch ; don't say any more " ; and I stretched out my hand to him. He took it and held it as he answered almost emotionally :

"You're a better man than I am every way. I'm only a dog beside you, but I'll serve you like a dog, if you'll let me." His earnestness amounted to passion now.

"Not like a dog, Karasch ; not even like our good Chris ; but like a man and a friend."

"I'm not fit to be your friend ; I'm only a peasant when I'm nothing worse ; but I'll be your man, God send the chance to prove it. And now you lead and I follow." He let my hand drop and fell behind, and nothing would induce him to ride farther at my side.

I was deeply touched by his earnestness. It was to Burgwan, the man, he pledged himself, not to the millionaire ; and I prized the offer for that reason alone.

I rode straight to the station and, giving my horse into Karasch's charge, I entered it to look for Mademoiselle.

She was there, sitting in the miserable waiting-room, dejected and sorrowful, and bending over Chris as he squatted on his haunches beside her, with his great head in her lap.

He recognized my step and with a whimper of pleasure, started up and rushed to me, fawning upon me with such delight that I had to check him.

But Mademoiselle turned pale as she saw me, her hands clasped quickly and tightly together, her lips parted and her brow drew together in a frown of dismay or pain.

Then I put the dog aside and went to her.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE HILL AT SAMAC

As I stepped forward two persons who had been sitting apart from her rose and came quickly toward me. In my abstraction I had not noticed them ; but I saw now that one was a priest and the other a matronly woman of between thirty and forty years of age.

"What do you want? Who are you? This lady is in my care," said the priest.

"You saw that the dog knew me for a friend," I answered.

"That may be, but what do you want?" he asked again.

I looked across to Mademoiselle. She hesitated a moment and then spoke to the priest.

"It is all right, father. I wish to speak to—him." There was just a suspicion of a pause at the last word as though she had been in doubt how to speak of me.

"But Father Michel——" began the priest in protest, when she interposed and with a single gesture silenced him.

The incident gave her time to regain self-possession. Outwardly she grew calm, dignified, and almost cold, but her eyes were burning, and in them I read the reproach I had so dreaded during my ride.

"Why have you come?" she asked, when I could not speak; and her voice was hard to my ears and accusing. I hung my head.

"I have no answer," I murmured. "I am sorry; but I can go again." I had hoped, like the fool I was,

she would have been glad to see me ; and chilled and beaten by this reception, I turned on my heel to leave.

Then Chris made a difficulty. He ran after me so that at the door I had to turn to send him back.

" Call him," I said. If she could be hard, so could I ; and my face was as cold and stern as she could have wished her own to be.

But at my look she winced and bent her head. Her interlocked fingers were strained tightly. It was as though she understood the pain she caused me and her own tender heart was wrung at the sight. Chris stood looking up wistfully into my face.

" Go back, Chris. Good-bye, old dog." He whimpered in protest ; for all the world as though he knew we were to part. " Go, Chris, good dog," I said again ; and then he went slowly to her and licked the hands which were straining in such emotion.

She did not look at me and I turned again and went out.

" Burgwan ! "

It was barely more than a whisper, but I heard it clearly as I stepped out of the door. I did not heed it, however. I had done wrong in coming there at all, and I was sufficiently master of myself now to hold to my resolve to leave her. I walked toward the spot where I had left Karasch with the horses ; but I had not taken a dozen steps before a great scurry of feet came after me, and Chris was yelping with glee and thrusting his nose into my hand and fondling me.

" You shouldn't have come, Chris. You're only making it all the harder, old dog. You must go back. You belong to her now " ; and turning to send him back, I saw her coming toward us.

" I called to you, Burgwan."

" I thought it best not to hear you, Mademoiselle."

" I could not let you go like that," she murmured ; and then a pause fell between us and we stood for a minute or more, neither knowing what to say.

"Karasch is here, too?" she said at length, seeing him with the horses.

"Yes. He was anxious to know you were really safe."

"And you?" There was a quick gleam of hope in her eyes that I too had acted with the same motive.

"That was not my reason. I knew you were safe. I have seen Father Michel. I came because I am a coward. But I am going."

"No." Sharp, clear, decisive and almost peremptory her tone was. And again we were silent in mutual embarrassment. To relieve it somewhat I began to move, and we walked away from the little station along a path leading up a small grass-covered hill and reached the top of it before we spoke again.

"When does your train leave?"

"At eight."

"There is an hour yet," I said, glancing at my watch.

"Yes, there is just an hour," she repeated, monotonously, as if glad of something commonplace to say. And again we came to a stop.

"Shall we sit down? The view is lovely," I said next.

"Oh, don't, for God's sake, don't." It was a cry right from her heart. "Can't you see what you are making me suffer, and you talk to me of views?"

"We must talk of something," I replied, a little doggedly.

"Why do you come here?" she asked, turning upon me fiercely. "If you had been the man I deemed you, you would have done as I asked—after what I told Father Michel to tell you."

"I did not give him time to tell me anything. When Petrov brought me your second letter bidding me wait for you, he told me that you had already left for this place. I came after you at once."

"But you said you had seen the priest. Did he not come to you? He promised."

"I didn't wait for him when I learnt you had left. I

rode to him to his house. He said I should cause you pain if I followed you and appealed to my chivalry and said he had messages for me from you, and urged me to stay and listen. But I had pain of my own, and with an angry laugh I rode away after you."

"That was your view of chivalry?"

"Yes; that was my view of chivalry. I told you I came because I was a coward. I am. I see it now. And you may as well know me for what I am." I spoke bitterly, stung by her scornful words, and found a curious pleasure in avowing my unworthiness. "I have forced myself upon you, you see; forced myself like a brute and a——"

"Oh, don't," she interposed, putting up a hand in protest, and turning away, walked to a fallen tree and sat down upon it. I followed and threw myself on the ground near and waited for her to speak. She sat thinking awhile and then said slowly—

"Things must be made plain between us, Burgwan. I planned to leave you in Poabja."

"Father Michel told me as much."

"It was for the best, so. I knew that when once I was in Poabja he would be able to help me."

"And my help would be no longer needed."

"I am glad you are angry. It helps me," she answered, quietly; and so silenced me. "You remember I told you I had nothing to fear there; and I would have told you why, but that I was afraid I could not see him first and so warn him what not to tell you about me. That was why I rode on into the town, meaning to find him out by myself. He is from Belgrade, and, of course, knows me. I meant him to help me slip away while detaining you on some pretext."

"Others did that for him," I put in dryly.

"You were not hurt, were you?"

"No, but you might have been."

"I was not. By a happy chance Father Michel met me while I was in the hands of the people and had asked

them to take me to him. He rescued me at once and took me to his house. I told him then about you, and he gave orders for your release. Then word was brought that you had threatened to take Petrov's life, and I wrote you that letter asking you to remain where you were for two hours. This would have given me time to get right away ; and I was writing you another letter, when Petrov came back with yours. We detained him while I left, and I arranged with Father Michel to tell you all you wished to know about me."

"You arranged it all very cleverly, Mademoiselle," I said angrily, as I rose. "I am sorry I upset your plans. I owe you an apology. I offer it now." I bowed with affected ceremoniousness and added like a brutal cad, in my anger : "I was a fool, of course, to have looked for further consideration."

Her answer was a look, no more ; but as I met her eyes my face flushed with the shame she made me feel for my brutality. I turned and covered my flaming cheeks with my hands and walked away down the hill.

"Burgwan ! Burgwan !" she called, and when I did not stop came after me and laid her hand on my shoulder. I shook it off impatiently, like a petulant child, and she placed herself in my path.

"Burgwan ! Is it possible that that is how it seemed to you ? My God !"

I took my hands from my face and saw that hers was white and strained.

"Let me go," I cried.

"Not like that. Not with that thought," she said, her lips trembling.

"Let me go. I am not fit to look at you."

"Not with that thought of me," she repeated.

"Let me go," I cried, for the third time passionately.

"Or I will not answer for myself."

"Not with that thought of me," she repeated again.

"I cannot. Do you really think so of me ?"

"My God, how could I ? I love you with my whole

heart." The avowal burst from me by an uncontrollable impulse, and I stood shaken by the vehemence of my own passion and looked for her to shrink from me.

But instead she smiled softly and with maddening sweetness as she murmured my name.

"Ah, Burgwan; now you know."

I seized her hands to draw her to me. But this she resisted, though she left them in mine, and as I looked into her eyes I saw the tears there.

"I have been punished, Burgwan," she said as she smiled through her tears.

"You love me, then?"

She met my look without faltering, smiling on through her tears, and made a brave effort to choke back her emotion, until her head drooped slowly.

"You must not ask me that, Burgwan. You must know all the truth now. Poor Burgwan. Oh, I think my heart is breaking." The last was little more than a sigh, and taking her hands from mine she added: "I am the promised wife of another man."

The words hit me hard, with a sting of its own. I had looked for anything but this; and I needed all my resolution not to wince and show the pain they inflicted, but to meet her steady gaze with one equally steady. I succeeded and forced a smile as I answered.

"I had not expected that," I said, quietly. "But in fact I don't think I know what I did expect. In any case there is a great difference between a wife and a promised wife, Mademoiselle."

"I shall be his wife within the present month."

"That gives us a fortnight or three weeks. The month is only a week old."

"You do not understand."

"If you tell me that you love another man, I shall——"

"Don't," she interposed with a gesture.

"It is not the coward who says this, and now it is you who do not understand me. I am not making love to you. I will never do that unless I can do it honour-

ably ; and that cannot be while you are promised to another man. But until you tell me that your heart is given to another, I shall not cease to hope and will not cease striving to win you."

She listened to me and caught at my words. She lifted her head and with an air of half-defiant pride she made a great effort to look me straight in the eyes and take up my challenge.

"I do love—" But she could get no farther ; her head fell, and she cried, "You would shame me, Burgwan." I cried with intense earnestness :

"God forbid that I should do that, Mademoiselle. I wish I could make it all easier for you. But this is life to us both, and nothing will serve but truth and candour."

She did not answer ; and presently I said : "People have been in this plight before, and have come out of it."

She took no notice at first, and then turned with a sad, sweet smile.

"You must not make this too hard for me. I owe you so much——"

"Say nothing of that, please, or you will silence me altogether, Mademoiselle," I interposed, quickly.

"Do you forget what I told you—there would be no Mademoiselle in Belgrade. I am the Princess Gatrina, betrothed to Prince Albrevics, next in succession to the Servian throne."

I tried to take it with a smile, as I had before taken the news of her betrothal ; but I could not. I could not even find a word to reply. I was like a man stricken dumb by a sudden calamity—helpless, numbed and beaten.

"It was this I asked Father Michel to tell you," she said presently. "I am so sorry." Just conventional words they were ; but the look and the tone told me how straight from her gentle heart they came and how intensely she was feeling. Just then Chris looked up at her and she bent down and fondled him.

"Good-bye, Chris, dear, faithful friend, good-bye," she murmured, and kissed his head.

"You will not take him?" I asked.

"Not now. No. I—I cannot. I should think of—of this." Then with a smile: "He will be so much happier with you." She stooped and kissed him again.

"It is better so, perhaps," I said. "But just as you will."

She was very quiet and calm now, and turning from the dog, she held out her hand to me, with a brave smile.

"Good-bye. You have not told me how to address you."

I took the white trembling fingers, and held them a moment with a slight pressure, which was returned.

"It is only Burgwan who bids you good bye," I said.

"It is better so. It is only Burgwan whom I can remember."

She paused a moment, her eyes wistfully on mine, and then impulsively held out her hand again.

This time I was carrying it to my lips when I remembered, checked myself, and let it fall. She was trembling violently, and her breathing was deep and laboured. As I loosed her hand I heard her catch her breath.

I watched her go, hoping she would turn her head; but she held on steadily and was nearing the bottom when Chris gave a short bark and scampered after her at a mad gallop, reaching her just before a bend in the path would have hidden her.

I hoped she would take him with her; but she did not. She stopped and petted him, letting him fawn upon her in his loving way, and stooped and kissed him, and then I saw her point up the hill toward me.

She watched him; and presently looked higher up to me. I waved my hand, but she gave no answering signal; and before the dog reached me, she had passed round the bend in the path and was gone.

I sat down on the fallen tree where we had been together and leant my face in my hands, overcome by a

deadening sense of utter desolation and dreary loss. This at first shut out all other thoughts.

But not for long. If the barrier between us was so infinitely greater than my worst fears had conceived that on first learning it I had been whelmed and staggered by the blow, I had gained another knowledge. She loved me; and with that priceless vantage on my side I should be a coward indeed to be daunted by any obstacles.

She loved me; and when I rose, my resolution was set. I would fight on to the end to win her, let who else and what else stand in my path.

CHAPTER XIII

PREPARING FOR THE CAMPAIGN

I DON'T know any place where money talks with such effect as in the south-east of Europe; and I made it talk for all it was worth during the week that I was getting ready to go to Belgrade.

I reckon that when you want to gain an end the chief means are to know quite definitely what you want, to grip on it with all your teeth, to pay liberally for what you must know to gain it, and to hold your tongue and let the other man do the chattering. You may also at need have a stalking horse.

I used one now in the campaign to win Gatrina. I was hit very hard when she told me the barrier between us was no less than her chance of succeeding to the Servian throne; but I wasn't knocked out. On the contrary, the bigness of the barrier soon ceased to frighten and began to attract me. I meant to win her; and to go to Belgrade to do it. But I shut that purpose away in the strongest safe in my thoughts with a time lock which would only open to let it out when the fitting moment arrived. What I said was that I was going to Belgrade in regard to a big loan which that little kingdom was just then particularly anxious to float.

It served me well. Any man who was going to put

his money into such a venture would naturally want to know things ; and, if some of the points on which I sought information did not seem to have any connexion, there were plenty of people ready to give it, and none to bother with my motives, so long as I chose to foot the bills.

I was well served by my agents, and inside the week I knew far too much to let me dream of trusting a nickel to the Servian exchequer, but quite enough to enable me to go to Belgrade and play the part of a representative of a group of American capitalists with amiable financial intentions.

I knew other things too. Secrets, many of them, about intrigues that were in progress against the Servian rule and government. And a nice mess of unhealthy pottage they made. One thing I had been particularly urgent to discover—the character of Prince Albrevics. It was anything but cleanly.

My money began to talk that same evening in Samac.

Soon after Gatrina had started on her journey, I surprised the dépôt folk at Samac with a request for a special train. I looked a pretty object to travel special no doubt ; and at first they laughed and were for hustling me out of the place as a lunatic. But I soon had them hustling with a very different purpose. Money did it.

I said I would start in an hour and a half, and having sent a wire in cypher to my agent in Vienna to help matters on at that end, I went to Karasch, and with him rode back to Poabja to get the priest's help in straightening things out in the matter of that Austrian officer.

He did not give me a very pleasant reception.

" You have been to Samac ? " he asked.

" I have just come from there."

" Then why do you come to me ? " he asked with cold austerity.

" Not to say I'm sorry for having gone there, but to get you to render me a service."

"You have seen——" he paused, and I filled in the words for him.

"The Princess? Yes."

"Did she send you to me?"

"No."

"I can do nothing for you," he answered, as if to close matters.

Then I let the money talk. I counted out the sum which I thought would be necessary for paying a search party and also such an amount as I guessed he would be glad to have for his church and his poor; and laid them on the table in two heaps.

"This is for the church and your poor; and this is for you to disburse for me"; and I described very briefly what I wanted done.

"It is either a right or a wrong thing you are asking of me. If right I do not desire to be paid for it; if wrong, I am not to be bribed to do it"; and he pushed back toward me the money I had offered him for his church.

"It's clean money," I said, getting up. "You needn't be afraid. Keep it untouched until you are satisfied it is clean and then use it, or not, as you please. I should like to have a report of what you do."

"To whom shall I send it?"

"To me. You heard my name—Burgwan—and can send to that name under cover of this address in Vienna"; and I wrote the name of a man so well known that he started.

"Baron Burndoff, the great banker."

"Yes, the banker," I repeated; "and my friend."

"I don't understand it," he murmured, half to himself.

"There is one other little favour you might render me. I need badly a fresh suit of clothes. Could you tell me how to get one?"

"I do not furnish disguises, sir," he answered, so curtly that I almost smiled, as I retorted, suavely—

"I am sorry to have caused you to say discourteous things."

He drew himself up. "I am not concerned for your feelings. I am acting for the Princess Gatrina"; and he bowed stiffly and formally to dismiss me. But I noticed that he kept both the sums of money; and I went out satisfied that he would do what was necessary and I was well pleased at the result.

On the ride back to Samac I made a discovery, I was somewhat at a loss what to do with Karasch. Staunch and brave he was undoubtedly; but there was very much of the rough diamond about him. I could not quite see how he was going to fit himself into the routine of my service.

"What would you like to do, Karasch?" I asked him.

"Follow you and serve you," he replied simply and promptly.

"I don't think you quite understand what that implies; and I wish you to do so. I live thousands of miles away, in America; and I expect to return there soon."

"When you have done with me, you can turn me away. I am your man."

"You are too good a fellow for me to turn you away without a reward. But the life I live is not like that in the camp yonder. I'm afraid you won't like the city life, Karasch."

"If I don't I can leave it. But I've lived in one."

"Where?"

"Belgrade."

"Are you a Serb then? Georgev said you were Bosnian."

"I am a Serb; and Georgev is a fool."

"So you've lived in Belgrade, have you?" I said, as a thought occurred to me. Did he know who Gatrina was? "How did you come to change so toward—toward Mademoiselle?"

"She told me something about herself when you got that crack on the head."

" You didn't tell me ? "

" She made me promise not to speak."

I had been pretty blind, it seemed.

" Do you know who she is ? "

" No. Only that she's a great lady in Belgrade."

" Did she tell you how she fell into the hands of those men ? "

" No ; she does not know. She was carried off and believed she was in the hands of the brigands, and that they would hold her for a ransom. But I could find out."

" How ? "

" I know Belgrade and I know the friends of the men with her."

" How would you get the information ? "

" Quickest to buy it."

Money was to talk again. " How much ? " I asked.

" They were to have three thousand gulden if they got her to Maglai. Not getting a kreutzer, they'll be ready to sell the whole scheme for less than half."

" Would you go to Belgrade ? "

" I'll go anywhere you send me."

" You shall go there at once and wait for me. I shall be there in about a week. I am going first to Vienna ; and you must use the interval to get this information for me. Lose no time and pay whatever is necessary. I'll give you some money and send you more. But, mind, we must have the truth—whatever it costs."

" They know me too well to deceive me," he answered. And so it was settled.

Money had talked when we reached Samac, and the special was ready for us. I took Karasch with me as far as Maria-Theresiopel, where I was to catch the mail to Vienna, and he to get the train to Belgrade.

A very full week was the week that followed in Vienna ; and money was talking every minute of it, while I gathered the information I needed and pieced it together for the campaign I had before me.

It was just a big bluff I put up about that Servian

loan ; and played it well enough to convince all who came near me that I meant it right along. It was easy to prove that I and those who were behind me in the States had the dollars and could put them on the table. That was true ; but the bluff was to make folks believe me soft enough to accept the security and vouch for it to others.

My attitude was that of the typical Missouri man. "Show me" was my one text. "Prove to me the thing is sound, and I'll find the money right now" ; and the very strenuousness of the efforts to persuade me was in itself enough to have made even a plunger suspicious.

But I kept a very stiff upper lip ; and when I raised difficulties, hinted at concessions that should be made, and asked for facts in regard to other matters, I was at last referred to Belgrade direct. This was what I wanted ; and I consented to go there ; but not without making a show of reluctance.

In the meantime I heard from Father Michel that he had been successful in arranging all the difficulties in connexion with the affair at the camp. The Austrian official had exaggerated matters to me that night in declaring there were dying men there. No one had died ; and the injured men had first been so frightened with the threat of prosecution for their part in the abduction that the money I had left for them had been accepted with very grateful surprise.

Captain Hanske had very naturally resented his rough handling, and, breathing many threats of what his government would do, had forwarded a very furious report to Vienna.

His superior was dining with me the day after the report was received, and had done himself very well indeed when he referred to the matter.

"You know a priest named Father Michel in Poabja, an out-of-the-way hole in Bosnia, don't you, Mr. Bergwyn ?" he said with a very suggestive smile.

I affected to think. "Poabja? Poabja? Whereabouts is it?"

"A few miles from Samac—the point on the frontier where the line ends; and where one might at a pinch get a special train; if for instance one was in a hurry to leave the district."

He intended me to know by that, of course, that my movements had been traced.

"I think I had a friend who once went there," I replied.

"This may be about him"; and he pulled out the report and gave it me and took another cigar and a fresh drink, as I glanced through the paper. It was a duly garbled official misdescription of what had occurred that night and represented the captain as having fought valiantly against great odds until he had been overpowered.

"He seems to be a valiant fellow, this agent of yours," I said. "And this—how is he called? Burgwan, is it?—must be a desperate character?"

He laughed. "Singular name, isn't it? Very much like yours."

"Now you mention it, so it is. But, of course, it isn't my name"; and I smiled in my turn.

"Of course not. A strange story, though. Do you think your—friend would know anything about it?"

"I shouldn't be in the least surprised. I'll find out. By the way, your man seems to have been roughly handled. Don't you think he ought to be promoted in some way?"

"Promotion is slow, you see. Do you think you could do anything for him?" he asked, as if the idea had just occurred to him; and smiled again slyly.

"I don't see how it affects me. Wait, I have an idea. I can tell you how you can do it, and make a pile for yourself at the same time. This camp on the hills he speaks of must be the spot where my friend went prospecting about some mine deposits. He told me there was a fortune waiting there for the man who developed

the thing ; but he knows the difficulty which a foreigner would have in working it, and has given it up. Why not get hold of the concessions yourself ; they can be had for a song ; and put this man in charge to carry on the work ? ”

“ It would take money.”

“ Oh, there would be no difficulty about that if the thing had official influence behind it—such, for instance, as yours. The thing’s right. The ore’s there, I know that.”

“ You know it ? ” he put in quickly.

“ I’d trust my friend’s judgment as freely as my own.”

“ You say a fortune ? How much ? ”

“ Oh, anything from half a million gulden upwards.” I spoke airily, as though a few hundred thousand gulden were a matter of comparative insignificance.

He smoked for a while in silence, his brows knitted thoughtfully :

“ Would your friend go into it ? ” he asked.

“ It’s the sort of thing I should take up myself right now if I had your influence with me,” I replied.

“ You Americans are a wonderful people, Mr. Bergwyn. We’ll speak of this to-morrow. I’ll think it over.”

“ It’s worth doing, not only thinking over ” ; and as I returned him his report I added : “ And this man really deserves some sort of compensation.”

He shrugged his shoulders and laughed. “ He shall have an official letter praising his zeal ; and we shall hear no more of that part of it.”

We did talk it over the next day and we fixed up a working arrangement.

Two days later I left for Belgrade, where, as my friend the minister had told me, I found them quite ready to make much of me, as a sort of possible financial saviour of the country. I soon saw the influence which I could wield even in regard to the real purpose which took me to the capital.

But even within a few hours of my arrival, and while

I was disposed to shake hands with myself for the adroit course which I was managing to steer, I met with an ugly check—most unwelcome and disconcerting.

A large house had been placed at my disposal, and I had breakfasted on the morning after my arrival and was planning my movements for the day, when my man, Buller, brought me a card.

“The Baroness von Tulken.”

I remembered the name. It had been given me as that of a woman of much influence at the court who was said to be taking an important part in political affairs. But I could think of no reason why she should flounce down on me almost at the moment of my arrival. I hesitated therefore whether to see her. But I decided I would.

I knew her the moment my eyes fell on her; and I started and caught my breath in surprise and some dismay. I could have wished her anywhere in the world except in Belgrade at that particular juncture.

She was looking out of the window as I entered, and when she turned gave me one quick glance.

“Ah, then it *is* you, Chase,” she cried, as she came toward me, both hands extended and uttered my Christian name, with a smile on her handsome face, as though the meeting were just the loveliest thing that ever happened for us both.

CHAPTER XIV

ELMA

A LARGE, long room on the first floor of a house in Prague; the furniture, once rich, now sadly worn; the lights dim except over one table where cards were scattered on the green cloth as they had been left by the players; close to it, partly in shadow, a second table with drink and glasses; near it an overturned chair; away in the gloom a cowering figure on a settee with old hands pressed strenuously on the hidden face; and in the centre a queenly woman, beautiful as a picture,

white-faced, distraught and trembling, but struggling to appear defiant as she faced a boy of nineteen who was regarding her with looks in which hot love, horrified repugnance and disgust struggled with the bewildering pain of the knowledge of her unworthiness. She had been caught red-handed in the flagrant use of the tricks of a common card cheat ; and the rest had gone, with flouts and scoffs and jeers, leaving the two, the boy, face to face with the sudden consciousness of her shame, and suffering as only a boy in his calf love can suffer : the woman, scared and confused, but wrathful and relying defiantly upon the power of her beauty.

I was the boy ; and Elma Dreschkel, now the Baroness von Tulken, was the woman. We had not met since that night ; but the picture flashed back upon my memory, resistlessly and instantaneously, as I felt once more upon me those dark, dangerous, and strangely compelling eyes of hers.

" You are surprised, of course ; but you will not refuse me your hand," she said, as I hesitated to take hers.

I took her hand. " Yes, I am surprised," I answered.

" You are not changed much. Older, broader, more manly, of course, and much handsomer, too."

" The change in my looks may not be very great." It was a fatuous thing to say, for it gave her a chance which her ready wit seized at once.

" I have not changed even in looks," she said, with a sigh and droop of the eyes and a little graceful gesture of the hands. She did herself less than justice, however. The seven years had ripened her beauty of form and face ; the girl had become a woman ; and the woman more than fulfilled the promise of the girl.

She knew I was looking very closely at her and she paused long enough to give me ample opportunity. Then she glanced up and smiled : hers was one of the most dangerous smiles ever given to a woman.

" Well ? " she asked, as if challenging me. Was

she anxious to establish our relations upon something of the old footing?

"To what do I owe the favour of this visit?" I asked in a precise tone.

But she only laughed. "Is it a favour, really, do you think?"

"It is, at any rate, as I said, a surprise."

"Why? Why should it be a surprise that I wished to see you again, and that hearing a great financier, Chase F. Bergwyn, was coming here, I rushed here the first moment I could to make sure that it was you?"

"The surprise may be to find you in Belgrade."

"Oh, yes, that of course—but not that I should wish to see you." She had always been clever in turning my words back upon me.

"I am afraid you misunderstand me," I said after a pause. "I meant to ask you if there was anything I could do for you?"

"Would you do it, Chase?" she cried with quick daring, flashing her eyes upon me.

"Will you regard the question as put quite formally? This visit is quite unexpected, and as I am a somewhat busy man just now, my time is very much occupied."

"I am still standing," she answered, unexpectedly.

I placed a chair for her and she sat down, gracefully—she did all things gracefully—and smiled. "How long can you spare me?" She put the question lightly, with mockery in every accent.

"I have engagements right through the day, Baroness. . . ."

She interposed with a quick gesture, rose suddenly and looked at me as if I had insulted her by the use of her title.

In reply I glanced at the card which I still held in my hand.

"Yes, I married for money and position. What would you have had me do?" She made the quick question a reproach, speaking in a low tense tone as of carefully

restrained feeling, with a dash of personal defiance, paused and then added slowly : " I was deserted by—every one. The Baron was three times my age, wealthy, and believed in me and trusted me. When even those who might have had faith in me turned their backs upon me, and deserted me, he offered me the shelter of his rank and riches and name. And even if I had no heart to give him in response, was I to blame for giving him my hand ? Does it lie with you to reproach me ?—you, of all men ; you ? "

So intense was her tone, so magnetic her influence, and so realistic her acting that she actually roused in me for the moment the feeling that in that old time it was I who had wronged her and played the part of coward now suggested, and not she who had cheated and cozened me in my boyish infatuation until for years my faith in all women had been destroyed. Yet I knew that she was that most dangerous of all created beings—a beautiful woman with brains and without a heart.

" I am not reproaching you," I answered. " On the contrary, I congratulate you."

A pause of some embarrassment followed. What I wished to learn was her motive in coming to me.

" I suppose that really I ought not to have come to you in this way, but have waited until we met. You are so great a man now," she said at length. She was master of many emotions ; but the acting which had fooled the boy in love was powerless to deceive me now.

" You had some reason for coming, of course. Shall we discuss that ? "

" Oh, yes, I had a reason ; but I find it so hard to explain it now." Her manner now was that of a sort of engaging nervousness. " I declare I could almost wish you were a stranger, Mr. Bergwyn. It would be less difficult."

This was my chance and I took it. " You may really regard me as a stranger, Baroness," I said, gravely, with emphasis ; but she smiled winningly, intentionally

disregarding my meaning, and replied with great sweetness—

“ You were always considerate.” She paused and continued then with a glance—

“ I had my reasons for coming to you, of course. I suppose I may be frank. In the first place I wished to be sure that you were the Mr. Bergwyn who knew me before I came to Belgrade.”

Her eyes said more than her words then, and I gave the assurance they sought.

“ If I understand you, pray be quite at rest. Since we parted you have lived your life and I have lived mine—and our memories do not go behind that new life.” I meant that if she did not wish me to give her away, I did not want that old boyish intrigue of mine raked up. She was relieved by the assurance, and could not hide the feeling.

“ I was sure of that, of course,” she answered with a scarcely perceptible sigh of relief. “ It does not affect your purpose here.”

“ How could it ? ”

“ Of course your agents have been making inquiries about everything here, and I suppose you know something of my position and influence. I am a rich woman, Mr. Bergwyn, and stand high in the confidence of many people in Belgrade.”

“ I had heard of the Baroness von Tulken as one enjoying considerable influence at Court.”

“ Yes, I have influence ; and even if I had found you a stranger I intended to place it entirely at your service. Need I say how much more I should wish to do so, seeing you are who you are.”

“ I thought we were not to remember that.”

“ How precise you men of business are ! ” she laughed. “ Well, do you accept my offer ? ”

“ I should be charmed, of course, and if the need arises I shall instantly remember your promise.”

“ Is that a refusal ? ” she asked swiftly.

"A conditional acceptance rather, is it not?"

"I did not come for conditions. I came for frank acceptance or rejection of my offer."

"I arrived but last night," I reminded her, blandly.

"You are playing with words. What is your object in Belgrade?"

"I think every one in the capital who knows of my presence knows why I have come."

"But I mean your secret object. You have not come here to lend this money. You know there is no stability in the kingdom, no security that even your interest would be paid. Why then do you come? What part are you proposing to play in all the intrigues at present rife here? Whose side do you take, and why?"

"The negotiations for the loan. . . ." I began when she cut me short with a laugh and waved the words aside.

"What is it you want to buy with your money?"

"Really. . . ."

"I will put it another way," she interposed again. "Which party are you with? The army are intriguing against the present dynasty; are you with them? The Crown is intriguing to secure the next succession for the Queen's brother; are you with them? Another party is intriguing to secure the Princess Gatrina in her rights; are you with them?—with us, I should say. If you are, then indeed your millions may be safe."

"I fear I do not understand you. The Queen is responsible for the betrothal of the Princess to the Prince Albrevics; how then. . . ."

The interposing laugh was now scornful.

"You have indeed much to learn. You will hold what I may say in confidence?"

"Yes; but without pledging myself to make no use privately of any information; and I think you should not speak," I answered after a pause of doubt whether I could rightly let her speak freely. But she had no hesitation.

"I will take your word and any risks. I wish you, if you take any side, to take ours. The Queen's object in promoting the marriage of the Princess—as good a girl as ever lived—with such a vile reprobate as this Albrevics is—what do you think? Nay, you would not see it, not understanding the cross currents of our matters here. She knows, as all the country knows—except Gatrina herself, perhaps—that of all the impossible successors to the throne he is the most impossible. She does it that Gatrina's claims may thus be destroyed finally, and Gatrina herself in this clever way removed from the path of the Queen's brother."

"Very smart, very subtle, and very feminine," I said with a smile, as though the plan appealed to my appreciations of a really clever move. "And what is your plan?"

"First, what is your motive in Belgrade? Would you help in so shameful a scheme against the Princess?"

I affected to consider and then answered with more truth than she knew.

"No, I think I can safely say I should not."

"I was sure of it," she cried, triumphantly. "And you would not help the army in their plans?"

"I do not know them."

"They can be put in one word—assassination."

"God forbid that I should deal with such a thing. But you must be mad to think it."

She paused and then said slowly with significant emphasis—

"When I know not, and how I know not, but matters will come to that if the army once have the courage to act. The Queen has some strong friends, but some terrible enemies; and there is but one way to avert catastrophe."

"How is that?"

"By securing the succession to the Princess Gatrina by the only means which can render it secure."

"That is your scheme, you mean. How would you

do it ? ” I had no scruple in questioning her now. I saw that some plan against Gatrina was in the making.

“ By securing her marriage with a man who would be accepted by the country as a king.”

“ And there is such a man ? ”

“ Yes ; the Duke Barinski, of Jagodina.”

“ I have never heard of him. What claim to the throne can he make ? ”

She smiled significantly. “ He has many. And what is most—he has the support of Russia. Now you understand.”

“ And *your* motive ? ”

“ The Duke is the head of the family of which I am a humble member.”

“ A very beautiful member certainly, and a very useful one, also certainly ; but I should not use the term humble, Baroness. You seem to have a strong cause, particularly with Russian influence behind. You think it will succeed ? ”

“ It cannot fail,” she said in a tone of dead conviction.

“ It is all very interesting, but there is one question which a business man would put—a man looking of course to his own interests only. If those who are with me in this joined in this scheme, would the Russian influence go so far as to guarantee the loan ? ”

“ Do you think I can pledge the Russian Government.”

“ Scarcely that, perhaps, but in such a case you may have some influence.”

She laughed very musically. “ You are much quicker than you used to be, Chase—I beg your pardon, Mr. Bergwyn—you think I am a Russian agent. Well, you are right. I am. My husband, the Baron, was one.”

“ Was ? ”

“ He is dead. Of course you know that.”

“ Your pardon ; I did not. And you told your people, of course, that you were coming to see me ? ”

Again she understood me ; and again she laughed.

"Yes. I told them it was possible I might have some influence with you—some personal influence, of course." She paused and added, slowly: "But I see now that I was wrong."

"At any rate I think we may now say we understand each other and this matter," I said as I rose.

"You will join us? There is no other way to make your interests safe. Russian influence is paramount."

"Forgive me if I hold my decision over. What you have said has greatly impressed me." It had, but not quite in the way she may have thought.

"I shall see something of you while you are here?"

"How long I remain is, of course, uncertain," I answered; and the evasion displeased her.

"That may mean no. But I must see you!" and she laid her hand on my arm and smiled winningly.

"But I may go over to the Austrian side, whatever that may be. They may also have eloquent advocates."

"You may find the Queen's chief advocate the most difficult to resist. I think I ought to warn you."

"Who is that?"

"The Princess Gatrina—a very beautiful girl and very persuasive."

Fortunately the start I gave passed unnoticed, as her eyes were off me at the moment.

"It seems to be a contest of beautiful women. Baroness," I said with a bow.

"It is perhaps fortunate for you, therefore, that you are now only a business man—with a short memory," she retorted with a glance which I affected not to see.

Then an unexpected incident followed. I accompanied her to the door and as we crossed the hall Chris was lying there. He got up and she looked at him and paused.

"That is an enormous dog, Mr. Bergwyn. I do not like big dogs."

"Chris will not hurt you. He is gentle as he is big—unless on necessary occasions."

"You call him Chris?" she exclaimed, in a tone of

surprise. "That is something of a coincidence ; I hope it is not an omen," and she gave me a keen glance.

"Why a coincidence ?"

"I was thinking of the Queen's advocate—Gatrina. She has had some adventure in which a dog named Chris took a part. I hope it is not an omen that you will side with her. I am very superstitious, you know. We Serbs are."

But she was not a Serb and was far too sensible to be superstitious. Besides, there was an expression on her face as she drove away that I would have given a good deal to have understood.

CHAPTER XV

DEVELOPMENTS

I SHOULD have reckoned it bad luck to run up against Elma once more under any circumstances ; but it was much worse to find her installed here in Belgrade, a woman of rank, wealth and influence, in close touch with the court and with Gatrina, and taking a part in the game of political intrigue likely to render her a serious opponent to my purpose.

There was no use blinking at ugly facts, or attempting to hide from myself that if she came to learn the real purpose of my presence in Belgrade, she could do me incalculable mischief ; and I did not begin to persuade myself that if the occasion arose she would hesitate to do it.

It was in this wise. In those silly calf days of my boyish infatuation I had written the usual wild, high-falutin nonsense to her—and plenty of it. Pouring out my soul to her, I had thought it then : making an egregious young ass of myself, I deemed it now ; but soulful or asinine, there were the letters on record against me. Nor could I doubt that if Elma found me attempting to use my influence with Gatrina against the plans of the Russian party those letters would be used for all they were worth to checkmate that influence.

I flinched and flushed at the thought of those letters being read by Gatrina. That must be stopped somehow, and I must get them back into my possession. But how? I could not see any means at present. Elma was just an abominably clever woman.

Yet disconcerting as was this personal side of the matter, it was not by any means the most disturbing result of that talk with her.

She had made me realize that the obstacles in my way were vastly greater than I had reckoned. I had come to Belgrade with the somewhat vague notion that by means of my wealth and the knowledge I had gained of the character of Prince Albrevics, I should be able to stop the proposed marriage. But that somewhat arrogant assurance was beaten out of me at a stroke. Money was useless here.

I saw that Gatrina's marriage was the centre round which two at least of these ugly schemes of high political intrigue actually revolved. It was one of the most critical issues of that most critical time; and in regard to it her happiness and welfare were just the last things to which any one concerned gave five cents' worth of consideration.

The court scheme meant her sacrifice to such a man as this Albrevics in order that she might be out of the way of the Queen's project to secure the succession for her brother. The Russian plan was scarcely less treacherous. They were wishing to use her as a counter in order to get their own puppet on the throne:

Then there was the third plot—that of the army; and so far as it concerned Gatrina it threatened to be worse than either of the others. If it came to a head and Elma's grim forecast of assassination were realized, it would be directed against the Obrenovics family as a whole. Gatrina, as a member of that family, would be in actual personal danger.

I had looked for anything rather than this. But Elma had outlined the picture; and my own concern

for Gatrina soon painted in the details in lurid and alarmist colours.

I was still groping for the guiding thread in all this tangled skein of trouble when the first of my appointed visitors was announced, and I had to assume my rôle of hard-headed business man in regard to the proposed loan.

He was a man high up in the Government, and I listened gravely to his proposals, putting a number of objections much as I had done in Vienna ; and then said that I had heard so much of the instability of the Government and of plots and conspiracies, that I must take time to satisfy myself what they all meant.

" You need have no apprehension, Mr. Bergwyn," he declared blandly. " The Throne and the Government have never been more secure ; and now that the vexed question of the succession is about to be so happily settled, there is not the slightest ground for alarm."

" To be settled how ? "

" By the marriage of the Princess Gatrina to Prince Albrevics. All faction will end with that."

" And Russia ? "

He waved his hands deprecatingly. " Russia will accept the situation. She always does, when once it is established."

" But the Queen's popularity ? "

" Was never greater."

" And her intentions as to her brother's succession ? "

" The merest *canard*—absolutely without foundation."

" You think Prince Albrevics would be accepted by the country ? "

" He is not popular, it is true ; but we Serbs are a peace-loving people and, when a thing is settled and makes for peace, we accept it and work for it."

" And the army ? "

" There has been discontent, I know, and certain appointments have been made by the Crown which have provoked criticism. But the leaders are loyal and sound. There will be no trouble."

" I would wish to convince myself at first hand.

Whom should I see? I want the name of a man who knows; and not necessarily a Government man."

"You can take it from me."

"That does not mean you would rather I saw no one?"

He flinched at the blunt question very slightly, and then smiled. "Certainly not. I am not so foolish. No man knows the feeling of the army as a whole better than Colonel Petrosch. And you can speak to him freely. He is the better man for you to see, perhaps, because he is not by any means a friend of the Court."

I remembered the name as one which had been given me by my Austrian friends in Vienna; and having thus obtained what I wanted, I got rid of my visitor as soon as possible.

As soon as he had gone I looked up the note I had made about this Colonel Petrosch, and was surprised to find him described as a man with a strong grievance against the Government, having considerable influence in the army and believed to be using that influence against the Throne.

This looked as though he were the very man I sought, and I resolved to go to him at once. But I was to have a stroke of good fortune in that matter. I was ready to start when my servant, Buller, came in.

"There is a rough-looking fellow asking for you, sir, and says you sent for him. But I thought I'd better tell you first."

"What name?"

"I couldn't catch his name, sir. I can't understand the language; but it sounded something like Crash."

I laughed. "Karasch, Buller. Bring him up at once; and be very civil to him."

Karasch was vastly impressed at finding me in such surroundings and his fine dark eyes rolled about him with a gaze of wonderment and settled first upon Chris, who got up at his entrance, and then upon me. I think he was not a little nervous, for all his attempt to appear self-possessed.

"I have done your bidding," he said at length.

"Is your arm better, Karasch?"

He started as though the question recalled the old tussle between us. "It is getting well."

"Good; then sit down and tell me what you've done."

"I have seen the friends of the men who took away the lady, and I know who they were serving. I have also seen her and know who she is."

"Who hired them?"

"The Duke Barinski of Jagodina. She is the Princess Gatrina—but the men did not know her."

"Duke Barinski! Are you sure?" I exclaimed. This was news indeed. "Are you sure, Karasch?"

"I have seen the man with whom he made the bargain. He is at your service now; I have paid him. If you wish to see him, I will bring him here."

"All I need is to be quite certain. He would not deceive you?"

"He knows better," answered Karasch, with a dry significant smile. "I hold his life here"; and he held out his hand with fingers and thumb pressed together.

"Tell me all."

"There is but little to tell. I knew where to go for the information, as I told you; and as soon as I had done as you bade me and seen a doctor about my arm, I sought the men out; they are old companions of mine and as I had money they welcomed me. For three days we drank together and I had the story from three or four of them, both when they were drunk and when sober; and it was always the same. The Princess was at the great house of the Baroness von Tulken one evening, and when she wished to leave, she was put into a carriage not her own with two of the men dressed in her livery. They drove her by a certain route and at an agreed spot the six men who were to take her to Maglai stopped the carriage and with a show of force seemed to compel the coachman to drive away into the country, two of the men entering the carriage to keep the Princess

quiet. They told her they were brigands ; and after some miles they compelled her to alight and ride with them. They were to take her to Maglai and to receive one thousand gulden, not three as they told you."

" But the witchcraft business, Karasch ? "

" The Duke Barinski told them she was a witch, who had been detected and was being sent off privately in this way, because she had too many friends of influence to be tried openly in Belgrade. Had they known who she was really, they would have been afraid."

" Then he risked her very life. They might have killed her."

" No ; because not a kreutzer was to be paid to them at Maglai if the slightest harm was done to her. It was clever."

" It was devilish," I said, hotly. " Where in Maglai were they to take her, and who was to pay the money ? "

He produced a slip of paper with a name and address upon it, " You can make inquiries if you wish," he said. " You will find that what I have said is the truth. It is the Duke Barinski's plotting."

" You don't mean he went so far as to see these men himself ? "

" He did not declare himself ; but he was recognized."

I sat thinking a moment over the news.

" Have you any guess as to his motive ? "

" No ; I could have none ; nor could my friends," he answered, shaking his head.

" Would your men bear this story out even to his face ? "

" Why not ? They are now in your service—that is, if you wish me still to pay them."

Money was not to be so entirely useless after all, it seemed. " Yes, pay them, Karasch. Have you any money left ? "

" I have brought it ;" and he produced the greater part of what I had given him.

" You had better keep it."

"It will be safer with you. You can give it to me as I need it"; and he laid it on the table.

"Take what you want"; and he took a very moderate sum which he declared would be enough. I told him that for the present he had better come night and morning for instructions, and to let me know how to communicate with him instantly in the event of my needing him in any pressing emergency.

His news gave me plenty of matter to chew, and I sat turning it over and over in my mind. I saw Elma's pro-Russian hand in it plainly; and although Karasch and his companions could make no guess at the motive for the abduction, I could make one.

Had they succeeded in the scheme of getting Gatrina to Maglai they would have kept her there until she had consented to marry Duke Barinski. Then their plan to secure the succession would have come into the field of practical politics; the Queen would have been quietly checkmated; Russian influence would have openly backed up the united claim of the Duke and Gatrina; and the crooked path would suddenly have been made smooth.

Gatrina's escape from her guards had alone prevented this, and her safe return to Belgrade had no doubt completely disconcerted the schemers.

But they were not of the kind to put aside the plan because of this check, and we might look for some other move from them equally daring, cunning and far-reaching.

They had acted cleverly indeed, and had blinded their tracks successfully. The Duke had kept carefully in the background, and Elma had so far retained the confidence of Gatrina as actually to learn from her some details of her escape.

Complications were developing at a merry rate; but Karasch's news had suggested a way by which one of Gatrina's suitors at any rate might be driven from the field.

This was to face the Duke himself, tell him what I knew, confront him with the men he had employed,

and see what the effect on him would be of a threat to reveal the whole plot to the Court. The Queen's readiness in dealing drastically with her enemies would frighten him surely enough; and I knew the Russian tactics too well not to feel assured that, if once he were discovered and disgraced, they would drop him instantly in favour of some shrewder tool.

Then came another development. A chamberlain from the Court brought me an invitation to a reception for the following night at the Palace; and was at some pains to make it clear that it was to be held out of compliment to myself and "those other illustrious Magnates of America" who were associated with me.

Money was talking loudly enough in that, at any rate; and I sent him away with an assurance of my appreciation of the honour. Even as I was speaking to him my thoughts slipped back to what Elma had said about the "Queen's advocate."

I should meet Gatrina again. In a moment a hundred qualms of doubt were started as to how she would receive me, rendering me uneasy, restless, and almost nervous.

Buller entered, breaking my reverie just at that moment, to bring me a card. I took it impatiently.

"Captain Nikolitch, from Colonel Petrosch."

I uttered an involuntary exclamation of delight. My visitor was a man who had been my close and intimate friend in that past time in the Balkans; and coming as he did from Colonel Petrosch, he was just the man of all others able to help me.

"Show him right here, Buller," I said, gleefully, standing up to welcome him cordially.

The pendulum had swung right over suddenly, and the luck was once again on my side.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ARMY'S PLANS

NIKOLITCH was as glad to meet me as I to welcome him, and our mutual greeting was very warm and cordial.

"I could scarcely believe it was really you, Bergwyn," he said, when we were through with the hand-shaking and had lighted our cigars. "That was why I wrote on my card that I came from Colonel Petrosch. I can scarcely believe it now, I think"; and he smiled. He was a year or so older than I; a fair, handsome, frank-faced fellow with a winning manner and a delightful smile.

"It's a bit like a fairy tale, perhaps. How did you hear of me?"

"What a question, my dear fellow, when you're the centre of financial attraction just now in half a dozen circles. And do you mean to tell me you're a millionaire? Why, in those jolly old days you were as poor as I was, and, worse luck, still am."

"They were jolly old days, weren't they? I am just delighted to see you again. Yes, I'm a millionaire. I got hold of a mine which had broken the hearts of the men who had been working it with me. When they gave up in despair I got it for next to nothing and held on; and inside a month came on the gold by pure accident just where we hadn't looked for it. My perseverance had paid me and I stepped out of the mine that day as rich as a man need wish to be. That's all."

"You were always a dogged beggar," he said.

"I don't like being beaten."

"The same thing another way round," he laughed. "And so you've come back to the old hunting ground to take a hand here as a big financier. You'll have to be careful, Bergwyn. This is no gold mine."

"Tell me about yourself."

"Oh, there's nothing to tell; nothing much. I entered the army here, and having some influence, got my captaincy sooner than I deserved it. I like it well enough."

"Why does Colonel Petrosch send you to me?"

"I'm a favourite of his a bit, and of others. They've

let me know things, you see ; trust me, I suppose ; and all that. When I heard your name mentioned I pricked up my ears, and told Petrosch I fancied I knew you. He wants you and your money bags on the side of the army in all this mess of messes ; and picked me out as a sort of informal ambassador to negotiate with you. Though why the devil you want to meddle with things here beats me."

"I had the Colonel's name given me this morning as a man who could tell me the hang of things in regard to the intentions of the army. I suppose he could."

Nikolitch laughed. "If he can't no one can, Bergwyn. But who sent you to him?"

I told him the name of the Minister.

"By the blue sky, that's a curiosity. Why, old Petrosch is in the very thick of the army plans and dead against the Court, King, Queen, and all the rest of them. He'll grin when I tell him."

"The Minister assured me that the army was loyal to the throne, and that the Colonel could convince me of that. He admitted there was some disaffection in certain regiments, but that the feeling was insignificant."

"Oh, he's an ass ; and nothing else. That's the usual rot talked in the Court circles ; and of course the officers don't undeceive them and show their hand."

"And what's the truth?"

"Why that—of course we're talking as old friends, Bergwyn, and you won't repeat what I say?"

"I give you my word on that."

"Well, the fact is then that we're on the eve of a revolution ; and there's only one real power in the country. The army. They can't stand the Queen's methods—and they don't mean to."

"Show me."

"I can't understand either the King or the Queen. She's one of the most wonderful women that ever drew breath ; and in some respects the ablest and shrewdest. In others, she acts like a perfect fool. She comes from

the people, of course ; and that's against her ; but she could have made her position absolutely secure if she'd shown a gulden's worth of tact in the right direction. But she never does. She could have had the army leaders at her feet ; but she has alienated every one of them, by sticking all sorts of impossible men, relations or favourites, at the top of things ; and degrading every man of capacity who won't kow-tow to her in everything. As a result, bar her favourites she hasn't a friend left in the army. It's the same in everything else ; and the limit has been reached."

" And the king ? "

" He says ditto to every word she utters. She has made the present position impossible and the officers are going to change it. It's the only way to save the country."

" How will they change it ? "

He shrugged his shoulders. " By a revolution, Bergwyn ; a peaceful one, if possible ; but a revolution, certainly."

" If possible ? What does that mean ? "

" The abdication of the King and Queen—if they'll go."

" And if they won't go ? "

" They'll have to," he replied, with another shrug. " To tell you the truth, there's a section of the officers who urge violent means."

" Assassination ? " I recalled Elma's prophecy.

" Yes, it comes to that," he said gloomily.

" You are convinced that the army will stand together ? "

" Oh, yes. Petrosch gave me the proofs to bring to you " ; and he took out some papers and plunged into a description of the feeling in almost all the regiments in the army.

" It looks convincing enough on paper," I said.

" My dear Bergwyn, it's the result of months of work and agitation, and you may rely on it. And we have

the country with us. Look here " ; and out came more papers, proving that the feeling of people of all classes was on the side of the army.

" There is only one real power in Servia to-day, Bergwyn. The army."

" And why does Colonel Petrosch send you to me with all this ? "

" Two reasons. Either that you may be induced to join our side at once ; or, failing that, that you may be persuaded of the uselessness of financing the Government or any other faction opposed to us."

" And your own opinion, Nikolitch ? "

" My dear fellow, I'm only a fly on the wheel ; but I think you must be in a great hurry to chuck your money away, if you think of taking any side at all. The army will win in the end : we must, for nothing can stop us ; and there will be a new Government, and with a new King—Peter Karageorgevics, I expect—but until things are settled what's to be your security for any loan ? "

" You put it plainly," said I, with a smile at his bluntness.

" That's what I came for, Bergwyn. I speak partly as old Petrosch's mouthpiece, but chiefly as an old chum. Mind you, when the new Government is in the stirrups matters may be different ; there's a great deal got to happen before that, however. But I suppose you don't really come to fool your money away ? "

" Is that a mouthpiece question or your own ? "

" Petrosch might like to know," he laughed, stroking his moustache ; " but of course I shan't tell him a word you don't wish me to repeat. He doesn't think you came here with any thought of such business ; but he does want to kill the chance of your doing any with others than the army."

" If the army really holds the key to the position I might wish to have their influence for a certain purpose."

" He's a cute devil, and that's the truth. That's

just how he summed up your visit. But of course he doesn't know what the purpose is."

"Could the influence be got?"

"My dear Bergwyn, anything could be got in this little kingdom of ours—at a price. I fancy his notion is that you are after a title of some sort, or some concessions, and are ready to buy them by floating this loan. That's the idea in the Court too, I know. I chuckled when I heard it—but then I know you and they don't."

"No, I don't want either a title or concessions; but I can see now the gist of certain hints thrown out this morning. What I do want is to get to the bottom of certain things here in the first place. You've spoken freely enough about the army, are you at liberty to talk about other matters?"

"Of course I am. Fire away, ask what you like."

"What are the Court intentions about the succession?"

"The Queen means to secure it for her brother—and it's that which has put the final touch to the army discontent. They simply won't have him; and yet it's a fact that the formal pronouncement in his favour is actually drawn up. Some of our people have seen the document. Of course it's a secret; but we've got friends even in the Palace itself."

"But the claims of the Prince Albrevics and his marriage with Princess Gastrina?"

"Why, of course, mere rot. The Princess stands in the direct line of succession, but she's a woman and barred from the throne. Albrevics is an impossible; every one knows that—and a very unsavoury impossibility too. But the Princess has or had something of a following, and they would be glad to see her on the throne if a husband could be found who'd be received as King. They know this at the Court, and so the plan is hatched to marry her to Albrevics and get her out of the road. It's an infernal business, for she's just as good as gold. But she's in the way of the Court schemes and consequently is to be sacrificed. That's a specimen of the royal methods."

"Isn't there another scheme about here—to marry her to the Duke Barinski?"

"So you've heard that, eh? That's the Russian plan. He's a tool of Russia, and would make a pretty puppet for them if they could succeed. But they won't. The army won't have it; but what the army decides will be done."

"You astound me," I exclaimed.

"Are there any other plots?" I asked with a smile.

"Heaps. There's only one person in all the mess I pity—the Princess Gatrina. She may find things very ugly; although there's not a soul who knows about her who would do her an injury. You've heard the tattle about her?"

"What is that?"

"She was kidnapped the other night. There was a story that she had been carried off by brigands; but that's all rot, of course. Nobody knows exactly what happened except herself, perhaps; although I doubt if she does."

"I know," I said, quietly.

"What?" His astonishment was complete. "The devil you do."

"I'm going to tell you, Nikolitch: as my friend, you know, not the Colonel's mouthpiece."

"I'm friend first, Bergwyn, mouthpiece only afterwards—and a long way afterwards, too."

"Well, then, I'm here because of the Princess," and I told him as briefly as I could of the adventure in the hills and Karasch's discovery of the part played by Duke Barinski. I said nothing, however, of my feelings for Gatrina, leaving him to believe merely that I was anxious for her safety.

"You're a lucky devil, Bergwyn," was his first comment. "I wish I could have had such a chance to serve her. But what an infernal scheme! What are you going to do?"

"I want the army influence to protect her in case of

trouble. Now you understand. How can I get it ? ”

“ Tell Petrosch what you’ve told me in the first place, and in the second, pledge yourself to negotiate a loan for the new Government as soon as it’s well established.”

I thought a moment. “ No, to the first part,” I said. “ That’s for ourselves alone at present. To the second, yes, as soon as you like.”

“ He’s very quick. He’ll guess.”

“ Guess what ? ”

He smiled significantly. “ You want this Albrevics marriage off, I suppose.”

“ Any woman should be prevented from marrying such a brute.”

“ Of course,” he replied, dryly, and paused. “ You might put it on that ground ; but he wouldn’t believe it was all. We don’t deal much in platonic affection in Servia.”

“ I don’t care what he believes.”

“ I don’t know him if he wouldn’t be glad to believe a lot. The princess is very much in the way. I told you no one wishes her any harm.”

“ What do you mean by that grave look ? ” I asked, for his face was very serious.

“ It’s a very ugly matter. I told you what the moderate men among us feel ; but there’s the other section to be reckoned with. If their views prevail, it will be a clean sweep.”

“ A clean sweep ? ”

“ Yes ; every one connected with the Obrenovics family will be in danger—even the Princess herself.”

“ Do you mean . . . ” I began, excitedly.

“ Yes, I mean all the worst that may be in your thoughts, Bergwyn. And neither you nor Petrosch himself, nor any one, might be able to save her in the mad mood that would prevail in such a crisis. It will be a very ugly time.”

“ Do you think the other section will prevail ? ”

“ Anything is possible in the present temper, Bergwyn.”

“ Good God ! ” I exclaimed, intensely moved and

alarmed by the thought which this admission suggested.

For a few moments we were silent.

"I think I ought to tell you why I thought you had come here," said Nikolitch, breaking the pause. "Do you know there's an old—old associate of yours here? Her name now is the Baroness von Tulken."

"She came to me this morning."

"She gave me to understand you were coming here on her account."

I laughed. "It doesn't account to anything what she says."

"No; but she talks, Bergwyn, and—well, it's none of my affairs," he broke off, and looked at me as if inviting me to speak.

"Let her talk," I answered, not accepting the invitation.

"Then it isn't anything to do with her?"

"No, nothing. I've told you the only reason why I'm here."

"I'm afraid you've got a devilish hard task, old fellow. But if I can help in any way, use me. I must go. I've duty on. What shall I tell Petrosch?" and he rose.

"That I want the influence, and that to get it I'll do that business of the loan for the new Government—but not if there's to be any violence in establishing it. Prepare him in that way and arrange for me to see him to-morrow."

"Take my tip and tell him your motive, Bergwyn."

"I'll think it over," I said; and after arranging to see as much as possible of one another during my stay in the capital we parted.

After he had gone I did think it over and saw one thing clearly enough. I must secure the help and influence of the army at any cost; as that promised the most effective means of protecting Gatrina.

On the whole the talk with Nikolitch had the result of restoring my confidence and raising my hopes again. There were plenty of difficulties to be overcome, of course;

but if the army was resolved to change the dynasty and was sure enough to force that resolve upon the country, Gatrina's chances in regard to the succession were as good as dead; her marriage with either Prince Albrevics or Duke Barinski would be objectless, and then—well, she would be free to choose for herself.

That was all I could ask for and I awaited the interview with Colonel Petrosch with keen anticipation.

On the following morning Nikolitch came to report that the Colonel had been suddenly called away, however, and that he would come to see me the next day.

"Anything fresh occurred," I asked.

"Something is always occurring just now, Bergwyn. But I fancy the Colonel has really gone to avoid the reception at the Palace to-night. He doesn't wish to be present himself for one thing; and for another, I fancy he wishes you to go there without having committed yourself to us. You're to be tackled, of course—the show is got up for that purpose, I suppose—and crediting you with the blunt methods of certain Americans, he thinks you might feel impelled to tell the truth. We don't work in that crude way here, you know."

I smiled. "Did you say anything about the Princess?"

"Very little. I dropped a hint that you were anxious about her safety. He made just the answer I should have expected."

"Well?"

"That he wished to Heaven she could be induced to leave the country."

"And so do I; but I doubt it. You'll be at the Palace to-night, I suppose."

"I. My dear fellow, no. There'll be no place for small fry like me there."

CHAPTER XVII

THE QUEEN'S ADVOCATE

THE reception at the Palace was outwardly a very brilliant affair indeed, with multitudes of flashing lights,

clever colour effects, lavish decoration, and a prodigal wealth of flowers, as the setting for the showy uniforms of handsome men and the magnificent dresses and jewels of pretty women.

One's first impression was an irresistible tribute to the perfect æsthetic triumph which had been achieved. But that impression was only momentary.

I recalled the chamberlain's words of the day before—that the whole thing was arranged in my honour. *My honour indeed!* To kow-tow to the man with the dollars! To bow the knee to mammon! To fool and wheedle me and dazzle me with a beautiful farce gorgeously mounted, until I would loose the strings of my own and my friends' money bags, and pour out the golden stream to enable this kind of burlesque to be continued.

Then I caught sight of Gatrina and fell into a condition of troubled anxiety and delicious anticipation from which some one recalled me in order to present me to their Majesties—the young King and that most remarkable of women, Queen Draga.

I am not likely to forget that moment. The King who, in obedience to one of those impulses of his overpowering self-will, had had courage to choose his wife from among the people and was by nature, I believe, a capable, clever and strong man, was overshadowed by his magnificent Queen. Beautiful she was not; the face was too strong, too powerful, too imperious; and although she was grace personified in every movement and gesture of her perfectly-framed figure, it was by the wonderful magnetism of her personality that she dominated all who once yielded to the magic influence she exercised.

The few words of greeting which she spoke to me, welcoming me to Belgrade, and expressing the hope that I liked the capital, were uttered with charm that made the merest commonplace phrase beautiful, and endowed it with the point of significant meaning of rare eloquence.

At least so it all appeared to me, while my own words sounded awkward, clumsy and crude in contrast.

I was replying to a question in this way when Gatrina approached the Queen, and I saw her look at me and start in intense surprise ; flushing first and then turning white as the gauze dress she wore, her eyes unable to leave my face.

A few seconds passed while I went on with my reply, rambling almost at random in my confusion as I fought my way back to self-possession.

The Queen noticed something in my manner, and I saw the expression of her wonderful eyes change for a fleeting instant until she dropped them and appeared not to observe my confusion.

What I said I know not ; but she smiled graciously and saying that we should have another opportunity of discussing the matter, turned to Gatrina.

"I must present you to one of my favourites, Mr. Bergwyn, the Princess Gatrina."

The next moment I was bowing to Gatrina, and the King and Queen and their circle moved away, leaving us together. I mumbled some commonplace about being charmed to have such a guide. This was for the benefit of those within earshot about us ; and before she could reply an interruption came.

Elma swept up, superbly dressed and full of confidence, and held out her hand to me.

"How do you do, Mr. Bergwyn ? I am glad to see an old friend here. How pale you look, Gatrina. Are you ill ?"

"No, thank you. The room is hot."

"That is so often the cause, isn't it ?" she replied, with flagrant and almost insolent disbelief in the excuse.

"You must be careful, dear. You are not strong since your terrible experience recently. Do you know of the princess's adventure and escape, Mr. Bergwyn ?"

"I have but just been presented to her, Baroness."

"Oh, I thought you had met before," she exclaimed.

"Of course, I don't know why—but then one never does know why one makes such mistakes, does one? Let us go and sit down. You are such an object of attention, Mr. Bergwyn, that you'll be positively mobbed if we stand here. It isn't every day we see an American millionaire in Belgrade where we're all as poor as mice in churches."

She led the way to some seats, and not knowing what else to do, we followed. She played with admirable confidence. What she knew or guessed about that time in the Bosnian hills, I could not tell, any more than I could see her motive. But she seemed to understand that she had us at a disadvantage and made the most of it adroitly. She was resolved to pose before Gatrina as an old friend of mine, and I did not see how to stop her, although every word had its barb for me.

"You would be surprised, Mr. Bergwyn, and I think you ought to be flattered, at the number of people who wish to know you," she said as soon as we were seated. "The moment I said you were an old friend of mine, I was pestered by people wanting to be introduced."

"I am here on business only, Baroness."

"Here, to-night you mean. Oh, yes, of course, I know that. But you used to have a keen liking for pleasure you know"; and she smiled as though she knew a hundred secrets about me all elaborately dissipated and disgraceful.

"I did not mean to-night," I corrected. "I mean my visit to Belgrade."

"Of course, how very stupid of me. Why, it might have sounded as if I meant that in speaking to Gatrina you would be thinking of business." She laughed with a sort of malicious gaiety. "How very stupid I am. But then, we do call you the Queen's Advocate, don't we, Gatrina?"

"Mr. Bergwyn may misunderstand you, Baroness."

"Oh no, not the least fear of that. We understand one another perfectly, do we not, Mr. Bergwyn?"

"In what way do you mean, Baroness?" I asked pointedly.

She took up the challenge readily and laughed, quite joyously. "Why as old friends, old and intimate friends ought to understand one another, of course. What else should I mean?"

"The seven years which have passed since we last met, Baroness, have been the stern years of my life," I answered, for Gatrina's benefit. "And in them I have forgotten the follies of my childhood in the real life of the world."

"What a sage you must have become!" she laughed; but the laugh was more palpably forced than before. "Do you know," she added, "I am just dying to tell you of this adventure of Gatrina's among the brigands. May I, Gatrina?"

"No. It would not interest Mr. Bergwyn, nor amuse me."

"That was the adventure in which the dog, Chris, played a part; as I told you yesterday, Mr. Bergwyn. Isn't it an extraordinary coincidence, Gatrina, that Mr. Bergwyn should have an immense dog, positively an immense creature of the same name, Chris? I declare I've been thinking about it ever since I left your house;" and she turned to me with a glance. Her audacity increased with every fresh thrust she made.

"There are many big dogs in the world, Baroness, and not nearly enough names to go round. Thousands of them must bear the same; and a dog is not like us, you see, and cannot change its name."

"Yours is such a splendid creature, too," she said, ignoring this.

"You make me curious. I must have an opportunity of seeing it, Mr. Bergwyn," said Gatrina, steadily, looking at me for the first time since I had spoken to her. She was quite calm and self-collected now, and Elma's interposition had served one good purpose. It had given us both time to get over the surprise and confusion of the meeting.

"It will give me great pleasure, Princess," I answered gravely. I understood, of course, that she did not intend Elma to know the truth about the hill business.

"You are feeling better again now, dear?" said Elma, solicitously. "I am so glad. I wonder what upset you. However, you have got over it, and that's the great thing. I suppose it *must* have been the heat unless"—with a pause and a mischievous shrug of the shoulders—"unless it was the shock of meeting Mr. Bergwyn so unexpectedly."

"I am obliged to you for the implied compliment, Baroness. Do you think the Princess expected an American citizen to wear a cowboy's dress or a red man's war paint?" I laughed, and Gatrina joined me.

We were interrupted then by some one who came from the Queen.

"Her Majesty desires me to remind your Highness that the dancing is about to commence," he said to Gatrina, and added to Elma, "Her Majesty desires to speak with you at once, Baroness."

Elma rose. "I suppose I am interfering with your business and so am ordered away," she said with a sneer.

"Will you give me a dance, Princess?" I asked. The moment we were alone the feeling of restraint was revived.

"It is by the Queen's desire," she answered, with a shrug as she put the tips of her fingers on my arm and I led her away. It was a waltz and we danced it in silence. At the close I did not know what she would wish to do, and as I hesitated, she said suddenly:

"I suppose we must keep up the pretence. We are to go through into the further conservatory." The place was empty save for a couple of chairs, making a sort of cosy corner; and as I guessed the arrangement was of the Queen's making, I blessed her for her unwitting thoughtfulness.

Gatrina was very pale, and as she sat down she exclaimed impulsively:

"It is almost maddening. You might have spared me this."

"What is maddening?"

"Please not to pretend you don't understand. That can only make matters worse than they are."

"I understand that I wish very urgently to speak to you; but if you would prefer another time, I will go"; and I got up.

"And so force me to give some false explanation to the Queen of what I cannot explain truly. Thank you."

I sat down again. "Can't we clear the air a bit?" I asked.

"Having done this miserable thing you pretend not to know what it is. I suppose you can see that all this is arranged. That I was to dance with you, make myself agreeable to you, bring you here where we could be undisturbed, and then talk you into carrying out this miserable loan. You can see that surely, as clearly as you can see how successful you have been in humiliating me. You must be very glad and proud of your success."

"Thank you."

"Then you didn't plan it, why didn't you let me know why you were coming to Belgrade? Why not tell me who you were really? Why not give me time and means to avoid you? Oh, it is intolerable! You knew I was to play jackal for the Queen with the American money-man. Elma herself told you I was what she calls the Queen's Advocate. Ugh!"

"I don't like to hear you speak of the Baroness von Tulken by her Christian name, as if she were your friend."

"Is it one of the conditions of your financial business that you control the friendships of the Court of Belgrade?"

She was unreasonably angry, and, of course, abominably unjust.

"I don't see why you do me that injustice? I could not possibly know that the Queen would intentionally throw us together, and as for humiliation——"

"You knew it yesterday. The Baroness—Elma told you so." I smiled at the aggressive way in which she paused and threw up her head as she made the correction in the name; and the smile irritated her to still further anger. "I dislike evasion and pretence, Mr. Bergwyn."

I winced a bit under the lash of her words, and paused; and just at that moment my memory played me a prank. That scene at the camp when we had our first sharp will contest leapt suddenly into my thoughts, and when her face had worn pretty much the same resolute angry expression. Then I leaned back in my chair and replied very deliberately:

"That's just where you're wrong, I think. If you knew anything about me you'd know I like evasion and pretence and falsehood. The man who can do a dirty and unmanly trick in the dirtiest and most selfish way is just my type; and if he can do it to a woman—in the way I've done it to you, for instance—he's my hero. Of course, he must be a big sort of brute; cunning, despicable, and mean; a clever beast at getting women into a false position so that he can enjoy a laugh to himself by making them suffer—and the more they suffer the more he hugs himself. You know the kind of man; you must, because from what you've said about me——"

"I don't wish to hear any more about your ideals, thank you."

"I was only filling in the details to your rough outline. But what I want you to understand is, your outline is right and that you have just such a brute to deal with in me."

She did not answer for quite a time and sat tearing to pieces nervously a leaf she had plucked from a plant near.

"I did not say anything of the kind."

"You see it's this way," I said, not heeding her words. "I came to Belgrade to humiliate you, to insult you, to trample——"

"Don't, Mr. Bergwyn," she cried quickly.

I threw up my hands as one who is aggrieved. "You don't let me tell you the truth, you see. I think it's a little hard on me, anyway. A man doesn't get many chances of complete self-revelation; and I was just enjoying——"

She was looking straight out in front of her and turned her head with one swift glance that stopped my banter. I broke off and said very earnestly:

"If I did not come for that purpose then I came to serve you."

"You should not have come at all. You cannot serve me."

"On the contrary I have already done so. I know what you do not—the reason behind your—behind the supposed brigand business."

"What do you mean?"

She sat up suddenly and faced me.

"The scheme was laid here in Belgrade, and the men who carried it out were hired and paid by the Duke Barinski. I can produce the men who will identify him. I may also add that the Baroness von Tulken was associated with the plot."

"It can't be. How did you learn it?"

"Money; and the aid of a staunch friend of yours."

"A friend of mine?"

"Karasch."

"Karasch? Karasch." She repeated the name in a tone of reminiscence, very gentle and low, and putting her hand to her eyes sat back as if in dismay or pleasure at the associations connected with it. But a moment afterwards the emotion, whether pleasure or pain, passed, and her face, as she took her hand from it and sat up again, was colder and sterner than I had ever seen it.

"And you connect the Baroness with this?"

"I do, and can prove it." Her eyes hardened and her lip curled.

"I congratulate you upon your manliness, Mr. Ber-

gwyn. I know the real reason for your presence in Belgrade ; the Baroness told me that : your old and intimate friend whom you are now maligning in this chivalrous way."

And then I knew that Elma had, indeed, been talking about that old time ; and I understood many things ; amongst them the mess of mischief she had brewed for me.

CHAPTER XVIII

A DECLARATION OF WAR

THE position was so full of ludicrous absurdity owing to the monstrous distortion of my motives, and yet so embarrassing in my inability to explain things without going into the whole matter of my past relations with Elma, that I did not know whether to laugh at the absurdity or be angry at the injustice. I was angry and I wanted to laugh ; but that did not help me to find a reply to Gatrina's scornfully delivered indictment.

My silence and apparent confusion made the matter worse. Every second that I hesitated seemed to increase her indignation ; and I could not help perceiving that my influence was running down so fast that it would soon be many degrees below zero.

My first attempt to remedy the matter was unfortunate.

"We have got suddenly on to very delicate ground, Princess, but I can only say that I did not know the Baroness was in Belgrade when I resolved to come here."

"That means that you give the lie to a woman behind her back, Mr. Bergwyn ; and that woman my friend and also an old friend of yours." Cold, contemptuous and cutting in every syllable, her words hurt me to the quick.

"Pardon me, you must not twist my words. I am telling you no more than the truth and no less. If the Baroness told you——"

"If?" she broke in, indignantly. "Then it is *my* word you question."

"No ; that again has never entered my thoughts.

The shortest plan will be for me to go in search of the Baroness and bring her here that this may be explained."

"There is no need, thank you. It is not sufficiently important."

"Will you tell me what she said?"

"No, Mr. Bergwyn, I am not a tale-bearer," she answered with a quick shrug of the shoulders.

"You allow other people to carry tales to you. But that perhaps is your interpretation of consistency. Do you believe what I told you?"

"Shall we change the subject, Mr. Bergwyn? I hope your impressions of Belgrade, so far as the scenery is concerned, have been pleasant." Her assumption of courtesy was excellent.

"Do you believe what I told you that I came here without knowing of the presence of the Baroness von Tulken?"

"The views from the higher grounds are considered to be among the finest in Europe. Have you seen them?"

I rose from my seat. "I will fetch the Baroness," I said, bluntly.

She paused, got up, and looking straight at me, said icily:

"Can you not find some other opportunity to tell her what to say?"

I caught my breath with the pain of this and bit my lip as I gripped the back of my chair tightly. I think she must have seen something of what I suffered in that moment. Then I bowed.

"I have no answer to that, Princess. I shall leave Belgrade to-night for good. Of that you may now rest assured. Shall I take you back to the ball-room?"

But instead of placing her hand on the arm I offered, she sat down again and turned her face away from me. I stood a few moments in some hesitation and then said: "I bid you farewell, Princess"; and walked away.

"Mr. Bergwyn," she called, when I had taken some

half dozen paces. I stopped and turned. "I wish to speak to you." She spoke without looking at me. I retraced my steps and stood by my former seat. Some moments of tense silence followed.

I broke the silence. "This has become very embarrassing to me, Princess; but I have decided upon my course. There are some things I have to tell you, but with your permission I will write them and send them by Karasch, whom you can question as to the truth of that part of them which he knows. I recognize now the mistake I made in coming to the capital, and I will remedy it at once. I can easily find a pretext for my sudden departure."

"No. You must not go. Please, sit down. Don't you understand that we are probably being watched, although not overheard."

I resumed my seat then; and again we were silent.

"You are angry at what I said?" she asked at length.

"No. It was much too terrible to cause mere anger."

"I did not wish to give you pain." Her face was still averted from me, and when I did not reply, she turned and looked swiftly at me. "I was angry but I—I did not mean it, Mr. Bergwyn."

"I am very glad to hear that. Shall we leave it there?"

"You wish to humble me and force me to say that I am ashamed of the words?"

"God forbid I should have such a thought. But you appear so incapable of doing me anything but injustice."

"I am not; but the position is so impossible."

"Only if you make it so."

"I want to believe in you, but——" She threw up her hands and sighed.

"If you would do so, it would make all the difference."

"I am in such sore trouble that you cannot understand."

"On the contrary, I think I know more of the trouble than you yourself. I know the motive of the Queen in regard to your marriage with Prince Albrevics."

She started with sudden agitation. "You, a stranger to Servia, have heard that. Tell me."

"The Prince is impossible as a ruler for the country; not a hundred men in the country would bear with him on the throne; and in that case your own claim would be sacrificed. She would have you make the marriage for that reason—that her own plans in regard to her brother's succession may be helped."

"Yes, that is what they have told me. How did you hear it?"

"Not from one source only, but several. It is the common knowledge of those who understand these things."

"I cannot believe it; I cannot. She is goodness itself to me, and has always been my friend. I cannot believe it!" Her distress and pain as she spoke were intense.

"I only tell you what I am assured is true."

"What am I to do? Whom can I trust if not the best friend I have ever had?" She spoke almost wildly in her agitation.

"If as you think we are being observed, Princess, may I counsel you to show less feeling and excitement? Let me speak while you collect yourself. You must face the position calmly, for there is yet another danger that threatens you. There is a scheme to marry you to the Duke Barinski——"

"You know of that, too!" she interposed. "How do you learn all these secrets?"

"Let me put a question to you." I said, as a thought occurred to me. "Who told you of the Queen's intentions in regard to Prince Albrevics?"

"I cannot tell you that."

"Then I will tell you. It was the Baroness von Tulken." There was no need for her to say in words

that my guess was right. Her start and glance did that.

"I am almost afraid of you," she said.

"I don't wish that ; but I would rather have fear than mistrust. These things have been told to me plainly by those who seek to get the money I am able to control. It was only a guess that the Baroness had told you ; and I will give you her motive. She desires to influence you to marry the Duke Barinski under the pretence that the marriage would reconcile the rival interests of the two contending families, and, having Russia behind it, would render the throne secure."

Her surprise at my knowledge of these things was so great that it appeared to dwarf the significance of the news itself.

"It is wonderful," she exclaimed.

"The wonder is rather that while so many people know of all this, you yourself have remained ignorant of it so long. Can you bear that I tell you still more ? "

"Is there more to tell ? I am already filled with amazement."

"Do you know the intentions of the army leaders ? I mean so far as they affect you ? "

"Affect me, Mr. Bergwyn ? They cannot affect me."

"Your eyes and ears have been dulled by the conditions and restrictions of the Court life. What I tell you is now for your hearing alone. The army will declare against the family of which you are a member, and will change the succession to the Throne. When that moment comes it will be fraught with peril to you in common with all the Obrenovics."

"No, no, the army is loyal."

"That I know is the Court view—mine is the true one." I spoke as deliberately and impressively as I could.

"Why do you wish to frighten me ? "

"I wish only that you shall know the truth."

"But if all you say were true, do you realize what my position would be and what my duty would be ? "

"It is because I realize the peril that encircles you that I speak so plainly."

She sat thinking intently. "If you are right, then there is no one about me whom I can trust," she said, slowly. "Do you wish me to think this?"

"I do not know all those whom you trust; but that you need some one to advise you in such a crisis is but too clear. Of the Queen's intentions I can give you no proofs; but of the other dangers, I believe I can. Will you let me try? Can you bring yourself to be at my house to-morrow at midday?"

She looked at me in blank astonishment at the suggestion, and at that moment I became aware that some one was coming quickly toward us through the conservatory between us and the ballroom. "Some one is coming. Take no notice," I whispered rapidly, and then in a loud tone: "I shall carefully consider all you have said, Princess, and thank you for your patience with me."

"This is a rare palm, Prince. Oh, some one is here." It was Elma's voice, and she added with gentle spite: "Why, it is Gatrina and Mr. Bergwyn. I thought you had gone an hour ago. I am so sorry to intrude. Come, Prince, let us go back. We are in the way."

"Not in the least, Baroness," I answered. I had risen and saw that her companion was Prince Albrevics, and further that he was partially intoxicated.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Gatrina," he said in a surly tone.

"I have been here by the Queen's desire," she replied.

"Then you've been long enough, and can come away by mine."

He had been a handsome man in his day, and his figure still retained something of soldierly strength and uprightness. But the features had the heavy, sodden look of dissipation.

"We have finished our conference, I think, Mr. Bergwyn."

"How very fortunate we just timed our coming not

to disturb them, Prince, wasn't it ? " said Elma, with a sweet, significant smile.

" Yes, I think we have finished, Princess " ; and with a bow to me she put her arm on his and went away.

Elma laughed loudly enough for all to hear ; and when I turned to her she met my look with a glance of studied defiance.

" Will you sit down a moment ? I have something to say," I asked calmly.

" Shall I take dear Gatrina's place ? Do you really think I am worthy to fill it ? " she asked in spiteful banter.

" No, I don't," I answered, brutally. I couldn't help it in my vexation. " But I wish to speak to you alone."

" Just like old times, isn't it ? " She laughed, as she settled herself comfortably in the chair and looked smilingly at me, as though we were about to have a chat on the terms of the most confidential friendship. As I did not speak at once, she affected nervousness and said with a pout : " You look dreadfully stern. If you are going to be disagreeable, I shall not stay. I want you to be like your old self."

" I am going to say something that should please you."

" At last ? Oh, that will be delightful," she exclaimed, rapturously ; but her eyes were full of doubt, surprise and suspicion. " You have not said a single nice thing to me since you came."

" But before I say it, let me request you not to make any incorrect statement as to the reasons for my coming to Belgrade."

" Incorrect ? What have I said that is incorrect ? " she cried with innocent surprise.

" Then I came, not on business, but to see you."

" I only told Gatrina," she said, laughing coquettishly, as though she had the right to tell the world if she pleased ; and then added with significant insinuation : " You must have got very intimate with her if she told

you my secrets. I'm afraid I shall really have to warn the Queen that you are a dangerous man for her advocate to be on such confidential terms with."

"I am not discussing that. I am merely asking you not to repeat that statement to any one."

"But isn't it true?"

"No. And you know it is not," I replied bluntly.

"Then I am lost in amazement. You certainly did not come on the business of the loan; you are much too shrewd for that. And if you didn't come to see me, whom did you come to see?" A most excellent assumption of surprise veiled this thrust.

"I came as an American financier, Baroness, looking after my own interests."

But she laughed and shook her finger at me. "Fie, Mr. Bergwyn, fie. I did not look to you, the apostle of stolid truth, for such a statement." Then with a change to reflective seriousness. "If it was not for me, then it must have been for Gatrina. That's why I told her what I did and gave her a peep, just a little peep, into the past. But I have not shown her your letters—yet. I could not do that; they are all sacred in my eyes."

"What is your object in all this—this burlesque?"

"I'll give you one answer. I want you on my side, and I don't intend, if I can help it, to let the Queen's advocate win you over for the Queen. No, I don't; although she has the advantage of having been rescued by you. You needn't try and look as if that were not true; because it is, and I know that it is. And if you think a moment you will see what a service I am rendering her in letting people think you came here for my sake. Think of the scandal it would cause if it were known that you, the American man of millions, had rescued her and then followed her to Belgrade. It would ruin her—and people are very particular about reputations in this Court."

"Perhaps you know how the Princess came to be in need of a rescuer?"

She laughed again lightly.

"Of course I do, seeing that Duke Barinski and I planned it all."

"You are very frank."

"Why not. You have probably told her already that that brigand story was a fable and that we were at the bottom of it all. You showed me you knew it all, this evening; and I don't think so poorly of you as to dream you had not got proofs which satisfied you. I know what money can do in Belgrade."

"Russian money, you mean."

"Yes. Russian money, or any other," she returned, parrying my thrust with the lightest air of indifference.

"It has not bought the support of the army for this Russian scheme of yours."

"Ah, I heard that Colonel Petrosch's jackal, Captain Nikolitch, had been closeted with you."

"You take a deep concern in my movements."

"I feel a deep interest in all that affects you. But you know that. Besides, it is my business to learn things. We have many agents, and Belgrade is only a small place."

"Agents?" I said hastily.

"Agents or spies. I will call them spies, if you prefer. The point is that we have them—everywhere. I am one if you like."

"Whatever I have thought of you I have never pictured you as a Russian spy."

She bit her lip and clenched her hands and her cheek flushed.

"It is very easy for a millionaire to sneer," she retorted, speaking deliberately; then with rising passion, she continued: "What would you have had me do? God knows I had little enough choice. I was an adventuress, living on my wits. Then I was detected; and wherever I looked, the finger of contempt met me. What chance had I? I took the only thing that offered—a husband; my looks, as I thought, gave me that; and

I found him—what? A Russian spy. But it was not my looks he sought but my brains, my courage, my recklessness. I could do the work, and do it well; and when he died I was in too deeply to withdraw."

I had risen in the hope of stopping her. "I beg you to say no more," I said.

"I have not quite finished. Please sit again. I have to speak of you and Gatrina—the Queen's advocate."

"I would rather you say nothing."

"I have a purpose in telling you the truth. You have to take a side either with or against me. If you are against me, I will fight you fairly—but I will use every weapon I have. I know that you came here to follow Gatrina; I know that you saved her; my instinct tells me why you followed her—and I tell you bluntly, she can be nothing to you."

"I neither accept nor deny any conclusions you draw," I said, with a smile.

"I need no confirmation from you. I have questioned Gatrina."

"Why are you so bitter against the Princess?"

"I am not bitter against her—unless you force me. She must act in the Russian interest—that means she must marry Duke Barinski. But I have other motives, private and personal, far stronger than those of policy, that make me tell you you must not and shall not think of her."

"And what do you seek from me?"

"You may join with us in effecting that marriage, or you may not, as you please. But what you must do is to convince Gatrina beyond question that your coming here has no connexion whatever with what passed at the time you rescued her. I have prepared the way for that."

"You are very thoughtful, no doubt, but I don't understand you."

"I have told her that once we were betrothed and

that you have come here in search of me. You can confirm that."

"What do you mean?"

"By renewing the old relations—for the time—and making the matter public."

"You want me to act that lie in order to deceive her?"

"To convince her of the necessity of marrying the Duke Barinski."

I had to clench my teeth to keep my indignation under.

"I will not do it," I said, clipping the words short.

"Then we are to fight, Mr. Bergwyn," she said, as she rose. "I shall poison her against you, if I have to show her your letters in proof of what I told her. Will you give me your arm? I am sorry you make me your enemy and hers—it may mean danger for her."

"We shall see," I replied; and having led her back to the ballroom I got away from the Palace as soon as I could, to think over the latest and most strange development of the situation.

CHAPTER XIX

PRINCE ALBREVICS

EARLY next morning Colonel Petrosch, accompanied by Nikolitch, called on me. The Colonel's appearance impressed me mainly with a sense of cold, inflexible, unsympathetic strength and capacity. He was a hatchet-headed man in the fifties, with a long, narrow, keen, undemonstrative face; one of those straight, thin-lipped mouths which seem intended for the close guardianship of secrets; and an abnormally long heavy chin which suggested resolute purpose, dogged persistence and perhaps cruelty; while his piercing, hard, close-set eyes tended to confirm this suggestion of cruelty. Altogether he was capable of being an ugly enemy.

He went straight to the pith of our meeting.

He expressed great pleasure in seeing me, said he understood I wished to secure the influence of the army in certain eventualities, and then asked me point-blank

whether I meant to help the existing Government financially.

I answered guardedly that I was not as yet satisfied of the present stability of things, but that when there was a really stable Government I should be prepared to guarantee a loan.

"Would you regard as sufficiently stable a new Government having the united army at its back?"

"Yes, if founded without violence and commanding the support of the country."

He thought this over a moment. "It is all we can ask," he said. "Will you put that in writing, Mr. Bergwyn?"

I assented, and he immediately placed materials before me and waited in silence while I wrote out an undertaking on the lines I had indicated. I did this to convince him I was in earnest; and then I opened up another matter.

"If I give you this it amounts to a pledge that I take the side of the army, Colonel Petrosch. What am I to receive in exchange?"

"I do not think I understand you."

"You are gaining much by this agreement and, to be candid, I want something in return."

"Whatever the committee of officers can in fairness pledge the new Government to do, they will—but you will be able to make your terms then."

"I want the assistance of your party now."

"In what way?"

"My friend Nikolitch has told you I am specially concerned for the safety of the Princess Gatrina."

"Yes." Not the ghost of a feeling even of interest did he show.

"I wish to be assured of her safety."

"There can be no difficulty in giving such an assurance," he answered after a moment's thought. "So far as I am personally concerned I would do my utmost. But you have some further question to put, I see."

"She is, I think, coming here to-day. I wish her to be convinced of the feeling of the army, and that the officers are unanimously resolved upon their course of action."

There was a pause.

"This is a very grave request, Mr. Bergwyn," said Petrosch slowly, "Do you realize that you are asking me, one of the leaders of the army, to reveal our intentions to one of the Queen's closest friends?"

"You are gaining much from this"—and I held up the paper—"I am gaining nothing."

"I fear I cannot do it, Mr. Bergwyn," he said, reluctantly. "I might be very gravely compromised."

"Very well. Then I'll tear up this paper and we'll call the matter off."

"You are asking too much of me, Mr. Bergwyn. I must have time to consult others."

"I never change my terms, Colonel Petrosch. You decide yes or no, right now, or I must seek other means."

He leant back in dire perplexity.

"You would disclose no plans, merely give proofs that the feeling of the army is solid; and what you said would be received under a pledge of confidence."

"What is your object?"

"My sole purpose in coming to Belgrade is to secure her safety, Colonel; and you can therefore judge how far I am prepared to go."

"The Princess is one of our grave embarrassments, Mr. Bergwyn. If anything I could say would enable you to influence her to leave Belgrade for a time, it would be different."

"I have little influence, I fear."

He threw up his hands and shook his head, and was silent.

During the pause Buller brought me a card. It was Gatrina's. She had come after all.

"The Princess is here, Colonel, and with your leave

I will go to her. I'll send my man in ten minutes, and you can say just yes or no."

"You will secure the pledge of secrecy?"

"Otherwise I will not ask you to say a word."

It looked as if I were going to win, after all, and I felt in a confident mood as I hurried to Gatrina, giving Buller his instructions on the way.

An elderly woman was with her, at whom I glanced with little interest as the name, the Countess Vashti, was mentioned.

Gatrina met me with a stiff ceremonious bow; and her voice was cold and hard, But her eyes were full of trouble.

"We come by the Queen's desire, Mr. Bergwyn, to bid you a formal welcome to Belgrade on her and His Majesty's behalf," she said, formally and distantly.

I expressed my gratification in equally formal terms; and we sat talking generalities, until Buller entered and gave me a slip of paper with the one word "Yes" written upon it. I had won; and after a little more make-weight twaddle for the benefit of the Countess Vashti, I got to the pith of things.

"There are some points arising out of our conversation at the Palace, last night, Princess, which have occurred to me, and I should be glad of an opportunity of discussing them with you privately."

"Her Majesty's object in desiring me to see you to-day, Mr. Bergwyn, was that I should speak with you privately, if you desired it." As she said this she glanced at her companion, who bowed acquiescence.

I rose at once and led Gatrina to another room.

"I told you last night that I would endeavour to give you proofs of what I said. As to the aim of the Russian party there is no need for proof; the Baroness herself last night admitted to me that she had instigated your abduction; that you were to have been taken to Maglai; and that when there your marriage with Duke Barinski was to be forced upon you."

"She has said almost as much to me to-day—among other things," was her reply, very coldly spoken.

I could guess at the "other things," but there was no time then to enter upon any defence.

"As to the power and feeling of the army I can prove my words. Colonel Petrosch is here and he will himself convince you. Will you come to him?"

"It seems incredible. How have you prevailed upon him to speak of this to me?"

"Does that matter, so long as he does speak?"

"I shall be at liberty to report what he may say?"

"No, certainly not. It is for your ears only. You asked for the proofs of what I said. I offer it to you: but it must, of course, be under a pledge of secrecy."

She hesitated in anxious perplexity.

"I will see him. I can at any rate act upon any knowledge so gained."

"It is for that object I wish you to be convinced."

We went then to the room where I had left the Colonel and Nikolitch, and both men rose and bowed to Gatrina as we entered.

"Time is pressing and the interview need not take long," I said. "What I wish is that you will convince the Princess Gatrina, as you have convinced me, Colonel Petrosch, of the intentions of the officers for whom you speak so far as they affect her."

Gatrina sat down and looked at him very closely.

The Colonel on his side was not without embarrassment as to how to begin. At length he said: "The Princess will, no doubt, be aware that the family of which she is a member has incurred the extreme hostility of the army. And what I said to you before, Mr. Bergwyn, I repeat now—if the Princess consults her safety and interests she will leave the country at once."

Gatrina's lip curled.

"Is this all you have brought me to hear, Mr. Bergwyn?" she asked, with scarcely veiled disdain.

"No. I wish you to be convinced on two points—

that the army is united and must be the deciding force in the present crisis ; and that it is against your chance of succession to the Throne. Colonel Petrosch can speak with authority on both—if he will."

"On both those points I can speak absolutely," he replied ; and very succinctly and clearly he made good his case as to the unanimity of the great majority of the regiments. That he succeeded in impressing her deeply was plain.

"And as to myself ? " she asked.

"I much regret to have to say the army would not consent to serve under your Highness, or any member of your family," he answered, decision in every syllable.

Gatrina paused. "Any member of my family, Colonel Petrosch ? " she repeated. "That would include His Majesty himself."

"Madam, I have spoken under pressure ; but my words stand and are not to be recalled," he declared. "I speak not alone for myself, but for the entire committee of officers."

"Your words are full of dangerous insinuations. What do you mean to imply ? "

"I can add little to what I have said. The plans of the army have been much canvassed in the Court and elsewhere, and much misunderstood. But they have been decided upon ; although, of course, that decision is secret."

"Why do you tell me this ? " she asked quickly.

"At Mr. Bergwyn's desire."

"And why ? "

"Your pardon ; that is a question to be put to him."

I got up to end the interview ; and after a moment Gatrina arose also, and with a bow to the two men went out with me. We returned to the room where we had been alone.

"I have kept my word. I trust you are convinced ;" I said.

"I am bewildered. I don't know whether to take it

seriously and be gravely alarmed, or to scoff at the whole thing."

"I think you must take it very seriously."

"Do you counsel me to run away, then?" she cried, indignantly, and almost contemptuously.

"I am afraid I have no influence with you."

"No. That is true—now."

"Why do you emphasize that word in particular—now?"

She disregarded the question, but after thinking earnestly for a few seconds, her brows knitted and her face intensely serious, she said: "The one serious thing is the statement that the regiments are now unanimous. Do you believe that?"

"I have not the shadow of a doubt."

"Why are you so set upon frightening me?"

"You asked me that last night. I told you I have no such wish; I desire only that you shall know the truth."

"I shall not leave my country, Mr. Bergwyn—even if all this be true. Nothing shall make me do that."

"I feared that would be your decision."

"You hoped I should be a coward then! Thank you."

"That is not how I should describe my thoughts; but phrases are not of much consequence where things themselves are so grave."

"If what this Colonel insinuates be true, the Queen herself would be in trouble and even in danger; would you have me desert her? Do you mean you think that would not be the act of a coward?"

"If your remaining to marry the Prince Albrevics would help her, I should say it would be cowardly to leave."

She flushed with anger. "You do Her Majesty wrong, Mr. Bergwyn, in saying that. She knows now that, like the rest of us, she has been mistaken in regard to the Prince. I have spoken freely with her and the marriage will not take place."

"I am very glad to hear it," I replied in a carefully restrained tone, hiding alike my surprise and unbounded delight at the news. But she had not exhausted her anger against me.

"Like so many men you seem to find delight in wronging one of the noblest women that ever lived—the staunchest friend that a girl could have." It was an easy inference that the Queen had talked her over, but I admired Gatrina all the more for this chivalrous defence.

"If it be possible I should like you to believe that I find no pleasure at all in wronging any woman. But I do not take the same view of the Queen as you do."

"You have allowed yourself to be poisoned against her. I know by whom, and, perhaps, you are not to blame." A reference to Elma this and an unmistakable sneer.

"I think I understand your reference, and there are several things I wish to make plainer to you——"

"I beg you not to trouble, Mr. Bergwyn. I wish to leave now."

"You will let me explain surely."

"There is no room for any explanations. I know enough, thank you. Let me go to the Countess Vashti."

"You are very unjust and very hard. Last night after I had seen you I had a conversation with the——"

"I am quite aware of that," she broke in, smiling angrily.

"For God's sake don't misunderstand me," I cried, earnestly. "You must let me speak of it. It means——"

Impressed by my vehemence, I think, she was going to listen when the door of the room was thrust open with some violence, and Prince Albrevics entered, followed by Elma herself. The Prince was furiously angry.

"So it's true and you *are* here, Gatrina. What is the meaning of it? I have come to fetch you away."

His hectoring tone and the insolent ignoring of me made me hot.

"The Princess Gatrina is here by Her Majesty's desire, sir," I said, as calmly as I could.

"I have nothing to say to you—yet," he answered, first giving me a vicious look and then ostentatiously turning his back upon me.

Elma laughed, audibly enough for us all to hear.

"I have no need of your escort, Prince," said Gatrina. "The Countess Vashti is with me."

"You will come with me," he retorted curtly.

"On the contrary, I shall go with the Countess. Will you take me to her, Mr. Bergwyn?"

"Certainly." I went toward the door. I observed that she had not taken the slightest notice of Elma.

"I have the right to escort you, Gatrina. We don't need the interference of any foreigners."

Gatrina was in the act of leaving but at this she stopped and turned to him.

"You are in error, Prince. You have no longer the right which you imply. Her Majesty will explain to you the reason. Your arm, if you please, Mr. Bergwyn." And taking my arm she swept past him.

He changed colour at her words, and glared at me with a malignity that I expected to find utterance in fierce words. But he held them back and just did the cursing internally, I suppose.

"The Princess's carriage," I said to Buller as we crossed the hall to the room where the Countess was waiting.

Just as she came out and we stood in the hall, an unexpected incident occurred.

Chris appeared from somewhere and, recognizing Gatrina, rushed to her with signs of extravagant delight.

She left my arm and bending over him patted him and made much of him in her old way; and the dog whimpered and frolicked about her. In the midst of it Elma and Prince Albrevics came out and watched them.

"What's the meaning of that?" growled the Prince, with a scowl.

"One might almost think they were old friends," answered Elma, in her sweetest tone.

Gatrina paid no heed to either remark, although she must have heard them both; and when she raised her head I saw in her brightly shining eyes an expression I had not seen since I came to Belgrade.

"Down, Chris, down," I cried, for the dog was loath to let her go.

"He remembers me, Mr. Bergwyn; I should not like him to have forgotten," said Gatrina, very gently, but meaningly. It was her way of answering Elma's sneer.

I accompanied them to the carriage and as I returned into the house, the Prince passed me on the threshold. I stopped, meaning to have some plain-pointed talk with him.

But he prevented that. "I don't quarrel with a man in his own house, sir, but we shall meet again," he said, and hurried away without giving me a chance to reply.

CHAPTER XX

THE INSULT

I RE-ENTERED the house in a quite fit mood to quarrel with Elma for having brought him upon the scene as she had.

Nikolitch had come out in search of me, however, and was speaking to her in the hall, so that I could say nothing.

"You will not be long, Bergwyn?" he asked.

"I am ready now."

"I will wait while you dispatch your business with Colonel Petrosch, Mr. Bergwyn," said Elma, readily.

"I am in no hurry."

"I regret I can give you no time to-day, Baroness," I said, bluntly intending it as her dismissal. But she laughed it away.

"You can come and tell me so when he has gone," she answered, and turned into one of the rooms, contriving to convey a most irritating suggestion that she was quite at home, and perfectly accustomed to humour my whims.

"How did she know Petrosch was here?" asked Nickolitch. "She is a wonderful woman. She knows everything. She will understand why he has come."

"Let her," said I, with a shrug. "It makes no difference"; and with that we went back to the Colonel.

The rest of the business was soon dispatched. I handed him the undertaking I had drawn up and thus stood pledged to support the cause of the army on the conditions I had already specified. When the Colonel had gone Nikolitch remained, and when we had fixed up an engagement to dine together that night, he said—

"I think you have done the right thing, Bergwyn; and there is no doubt your action will strengthen the moderates among us. It will make against the policy of violence; and may render it impossible. I hope so with all my heart," he said, earnestly.

"What will happen?"

"A forced abdication. As I have told you, it has been put to the King more than once, and he has refused obstinately. But now, backed by the united army, it will be different."

"If he should still refuse?"

"He'll have to go. The Queen has made it imperative. For a clever woman she has made amazing blunders. Of course you understand the Russian partisans won't love you any more than the Queen will continue to be friendly to you now."

"If she gets to know what has passed."

He nodded significantly toward the room where Elma had gone. "She'll see to that, probably—unless she has some other move. If you can stop her, I should."

"I have no influence with her and seek none."

"That's not the story she persists in telling, my dear fellow," he said with a slow smile.

"It's the story I tell—and it's the true one, Niko-litch. What story do you mean this of hers?"

"I'll tell you to-night. I've a lot to do now. Of course you know your own cards; but if I were you, I should keep in with her. She can be dangerous, as I've told you more than once. Well, till this evening then," he added lightly, and went away.

What story had Elma been spreading now? I had better know it at once, I thought, and went to her to ask.

"The Colonel has gone, then? And the Captain, too. I am glad you have him for a friend, Mr. Bergwyn," she said, in her lightest manner. "You would have found Belgrade dull without a man friend. Yet you don't quite understand the Captain's position?"

"Did you stay to enlighten me?"

"Oh dear, no. I have much more important matters to discuss. But I wish I had warned you that although he is on excellent terms with the officers, yet he is not in the inner circle. He is of great use to them; but he knows only what they choose to tell him. He has been of great use to them, for instance, in getting you over to their cause; but of course he has led you to make a great mistake."

"He has just told me that you have spread some report concerning you and myself. What is that?"

"I thought he would. He hinted to me just now in the minute I had with him that he had heard something; and naturally I did not undeceive him. He seemed greatly mystified; of course I knew why," she added

"Perhaps you will enlighten me?"

"Don't you think it is rather a delicate question?"

"I wish you would speak plainly," I broke out, brusquely.

"I suppose it was in this way. You see you and I were together for some considerable time last night at

the Palace ; and as people had heard rumours of the reason for your presence in Belgrade—rumours connecting us, I mean ; I suppose they put two and two together—at least they put us together, that is to say.”

“ Captain Nikolitch puts the origin of the rumour down to you, Baroness.”

“ I don’t think I object. American millionaires are very rare in Belgrade, and if people chose to think that I was engaged to one, was it likely that I should have so little of feminine vanity as to be displeased ? ”

I understood now the reason for Gatrina’s coldness, her marked estrangement during her visit and the under-meaning of some of her words. She had heard this infernal story. Elma enjoyed my dismay ; and I believe understood the cause of it.

“ Do you mean that you actually gave countenance to such a thing ? ”

“ Pray don’t look so painfully shocked, Mr. Bergwyn,” she mocked.

“ You will place me in the extremely invidious position of having to deny the report, Baroness.”

Her laugh at this had all the ring of genuineness. “ How will you do it, Mr. Bergwyn ? ” she asked, in renewed mockery of my earnestness. “ Think. How can you do it ? You and I know that it has no sort of foundation in fact ; but how can we stop the tongue of gossip ? Let us be sensible and just live it down. But it is a delightful situation none the less, and just what I desired.”

“ I think you are the most exasperating woman that ever lived,” I said hotly.

“ I can quite understand that thought.” She spoke lightly and shrugged her shoulders, but after a moment was serious. “ I told you also, last night, that if you forced me to fight, I would do it openly. Gatrina’s trust in you was in our way and had to be broken somehow. It was broken when she heard this news. The Queen had to use the utmost pressure to induce her to

come to you to-day. Her Majesty did me the honour to ask me in Gatrina's presence whether there was any truth in the report of my secret engagement to you—it is supposed to be no more than secret—and I could not, at least I did not, deny it."

"It is infamous," I broke in, passionately.

"Infamous if you like, but necessary. You have seen Gatrina for the last time, Mr. Bergwyn."

"I will go to the Queen herself and deny it."

"You might, if she would receive you. But Gatrina was supposed to be coming as a last step to win you and your money to the side of the Court. Can she carry back any news other than that her mission as Queen's Advocate has failed? You are now, indeed, pledged to support the cause of Her Majesty's bitterest enemies—the army. You have chosen your side and must take the bitter with the sweet."

"You are building your theory upon the assumption that I have thrown in my lot with Colonel Petrosch and his friends. Do so by all means if it pleases you," I said.

"I judge by what I have found here; but I shall know for certain within a few hours. I do not act in the dark. But if you have not, it will make no difference in regard to the Queen's Advocate."

"I prefer not to discuss the Princess with you."

"You will find some one else who will wish to do so. Prince Albrevics attributes the failure of his marriage to you and will force a quarrel upon you. Rumours of that Bosnian adventure have reached him. I wish to warn you."

"Have you anything more to say?" I asked as I rose. "If you have, it will be well to say it at once, as you will have no opportunity in the future."

"I suppose I have made you feel like that, and that you won't believe I am sorry. You have driven me so hard. Yet I——" She paused, looked down, and then rising came toward me and said half wistfully, half

defiantly: "I need not be your enemy, and would much rather be your friend. Why won't you see this? All the influence I have could be yours if you would let it be so."

"I prefer to trust to myself and take my own course, thank you," I said, coldly.

She sighed wearily. "I suppose we all have our hours of weakness and perhaps this is mine. I am not ashamed for you to see it. Let me be your friend, Chase. I—I won't ask for anything else. But I feel such a coward now for all that I have had to do against you. I could help you in all—all except Gatrina."

"I do not need your help."

"I am not acting or lying now. Trust me and I will give up all this Russian spying business and never touch it again. I want to feel I am working for you, not against you. My God, I will do anything, anything, if you will but let me."

"I have already had too clear a proof of that to wish for any more. Your carriage is waiting, Baroness," and she went without another word.

I returned to my library feeling in a very bad temper.

I had not recovered it when the time came for my appointment with Nikolitch for dinner; and he saw it.

"You look worried," he said.

"It'll pass off," I replied.

"No bad news from the States, I hope? Not another financial crisis. They flourish over there gaily, don't they?"

"Men make fools of themselves there as elsewhere; and with us it takes that form pretty often. By the way, you were going to tell me some news about the Baroness von Tulken."

"They say you're engaged to be married to her."

"Who says it?"

"Well, I rather fancy she does."

"It isn't true. That's all there is to it."

"That's what the other side say."

"Who are the other side ; and why the devil do people want to gossip and chatter about me ? "

"My dear fellow, the place is full of gossip about you. I don't know whether you care to hear it."

"It don't amount to anything what they say—at least to me."

"I suppose it doesn't. But when a man's as rich as you are, they will talk. Have you heard that story about your dog ? "

"My dog ? What do you mean ? "

"They say he saved the Princess Gatrina's life in the Bosnian hills ; and that you were in it too. Of course I laughed at it."

"Naturally. So should I," I said ; but I was in no laughing mood. "How do you suppose such a tale got going ? "

"Some one with a grudge against the Princess started it. You know what spiteful devils there are hanging about the Court ? "

"I suppose there are."

"Rather. But this was a blackguard tale intended to compromise her with you. Of course there was a lot of talk about that carrying-off affair. Some wanted to make out she bolted from Albrevics. Shouldn't blame her. He's a beast. Hullo, there he is ; and not so drunk as usual at this hour either. I should be careful of him, Bergwyn. He was abusing you to-day to a friend of mine. He's seen us, I think, and is coming this way. Hang the fellow, what does he want to sit at the next table to us for ? "

Not wishing a dispute in so public a place, I was careful not to look around as the Prince and a couple of friends took their places at the table next to us and began to laugh and jest loudly.

Nikolitch nodded to the Prince's companions and we went on with our dinner, the talk drifting to our old experiences in the years when we had first known each other.

The Prince, as we could not fail to see, was drinking heavily, and I could tell from Nikolitch's face that like myself he was beginning to expect trouble. Once or twice the man was ill-bred enough to whisper to his companions while pointing at me; and then all three would burst into laughter.

"Should we have our coffee inside?" said Nikolitch at length—we were dining in the open.

"Yes, if you like," said I, and we both rose. As I did so I touched, quite unintentionally, the chair of the Prince. He had his wine-glass in his hand, and while pretending to move out of my way, he deliberately spilt the wine all over me.

"To the devil with your clumsiness," he cried, angrily, as he jumped to his feet; "making me waste good liquor in that way. Oh, it's the Yankee money man, is it?" he added, with an oath and a sneer.

"I touched your chair quite accidentally and too slightly to have caused you to spill your wine."

"That's a lie. You did it on purpose," he cried, loudly.

"Prince Albrevics!" exclaimed Nikolitch; while the two men with him got up, looking very serious.

"I can't allow any one to say that to me, sir," I said, keeping quite cool. "I must ask you to take that word back right here."

"Not for any cowardly Yankee that was ever born."

"Perhaps you will do it when you are sober then," said I.

"I'm cursed if I'll let a Yankee pig say I'm drunk"; and he rushed forward to strike me. I pushed him back; but this only infuriated him and he sprang at me again.

I had taken more than enough from him, however, and as he reached me the second time, his hand raised for a blow, I got mine in first and knocked him down.

The place was instantly in an uproar.

"Stay and do what's necessary, Nikolitch. I'm in

your hands. I'm going to smoke over there," I said, pointing to a table at a distance. And taking out my cigar-case I walked away as the Prince's friends were picking him up.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DUEL

I MUST have hit the Prince hard, judging by the effects. His friends picked him up and after a minute or so led him away into the hotel. Then Nikolitch came across to me, his look very troubled.

"This is an ugly business, Bergwyn. He's badly marked and half dazed with your blow."

"I am more sorry for it than I can say," I replied. I regretted it intensely indeed.

"It was his fault—his only. We all saw that. He came to the place with the intention of quarrelling. He knew we were to dine here. One of his companions heard it from a friend of mine. He behaved abominably. We all see that: even his friends."

"Oh, yes, the insult was deliberate. I couldn't take that. What is to happen?"

"I said that we would go to your house: and should be there, if they had a message to bring. Shall we go?"

"It means a meeting, of course," I said, as we left.

"Of course. Have you been out before?"

"No; we don't settle our quarrels this way in the States; but I've been in more than one ugly scrap and come through."

"He's an old hand at it and is an excellent swordsman."

"I'd give a good deal to be out of it," I said, after a pause. My companion glanced at me in some surprise.

"I don't see how you can avoid it."

"I'm not afraid. I don't mean that. But coming right on top of what you were saying about the Princess it will set tongues wagging about her."

"You mean the dog story?" I nodded. "You don't mean there's anything in that?"

"There's one woman who knows it all and by this time has the proofs. The Baroness von Tulken."

"To the devil with that woman. She's in everything," he exclaimed. "Of course that's where it comes from: and of course she told Albrevics. It's an ugly story for him to hear. You'll have to be careful. He means mischief."

"I'm not thinking about him."

"No, but he's been thinking about you, Bergwyn. What will you do?"

"What the devil can I do, man? If it would help things for her, I'd kill him; but it would only make matters worse for her. Every one will set the quarrel down to her; and that's just what I'd have given anything to avoid."

"Oh, it wouldn't hurt her. It doesn't hurt a woman here for two men to quarrel about her—choosing, of course, a decent pretext—and for one of 'em to be killed. it's happened often enough." His indifferent tone no less than his words astonished me. "Are you a good shot?" he added after a pause.

"I can shoot a bit, and use a sword well enough to keep myself out of danger, probably, if it comes to that."

"It will come to one or the other, Bergwyn. There's no other way now. Have you any foils here?" he asked as we reached my house; and when I produced them he proposed that we should try a bout.

We took off our coats and set to work at once. Mine was a very indifferent style, very rough and ready, and his particularly polished, acquired in the latest Italian school. But mine served me well enough for defensive purposes.

"You haven't much to fear from the Prince," he said in one of the breathing spaces. "His is also the Italian style; and he's better than I am; but you have a devil

of a defence. Can you force the fighting a bit? Try now."

We crossed again and this time, after a long, defensive play I changed my tactics suddenly, and touched him.

"You got me in the arm," he cried, directly. "And well done, too. You'll wear the Prince down. That's his one failing—he can't keep his temper."

We were thus engaged when Buller brought word that the friends of Prince Albrevics had arrived. Nikolitch put on his coat and went to them. He was in high spirits.

"It is the challenge, of course," he said when he returned. "Shall we make it swords or pistols? I have arranged to meet to-morrow morning a mile or two out of the city. If you don't want to kill him I should choose swords."

"Let it be swords then," I agreed.

"He's got the devil of a bruise on his face, they tell me," he declared with obvious glee, as he left me again. "As if a horse had kicked him, one of them says."

"We've arranged it all," he reported when he came back again. "They were surprised at your choosing swords, because of his reputation, but it will be all right. And now I'll be off and find some one to act with me. Get to bed early and have as much sleep as you can. I'll be round in time in the morning."

I sat for some time after he had left me, smoking and thinking. I regretted the whole thing more than I can say; but when I found my thoughts getting into a very gloomy vein, I put the brake on; and taking Nikolitch's advice, went off to bed and slept soundly until Buller called me.

Nikolitch came in good time, bringing a friend, a Captain Astic, and we drove off. It was a gloriously fine morning.

Of my sensations I need not say much, I was thoughtful, preoccupied indeed, and gloomy. I don't think I was afraid; although the deliberateness of the prepara-

tions and the anticipation of having to meet a man in cold blood and fight him for my life, made the affair appear almost formidable.

I don't think I spoke during the drive out. I believe my companions thought I was suffering from fear; but it was not conscious fear, if fear at all. I did not anticipate any serious results to myself from the duel. Such a thought never occurred to me: it was the lethargy of an overwhelming revolt from the affair as a whole.

Soon after reaching the meeting-place, the Prince and his party arrived. Directly afterwards the four seconds busied themselves in settling the preliminaries, and then Nikolitch introduced a fifth man to me.

"Doctor Astic, the Captain's brother, Bergwyn."

We shook hands and the doctor had a steady look into my eyes. "It's a chilly morning, although so bright—but we get them here sometimes," he said.

"Any morning's good enough for this sort of thing," I answered; and he had another stare at me and then put down his case of instruments on the tree where I had been sitting.

"Will you get ready, Mr. Bergwyn?" asked Captain Astic.

I saw the Prince already had his coat off and I made ready, the Captain meanwhile pointing out the positions we were to take with cheerful but professional coolness. As they placed us, I saw the mark of my blow on the Prince's face and I noticed also that he was none too steady on his feet. I called Nikolitch to me and pointed this out.

"It's his affair," he answered with a shrug of the shoulders.

"I can't fight a sick man," I said, sharply. "Speak to the doctor about it."

"But it's so irregular," he objected.

"I insist," I declared.

He spoke to Astic and then to the Prince's seconds and after some discussion, in which all four took part,

they called the doctor up to them. Then his seconds spoke to the Prince and some angry words passed ; and again the four seconds consulted. Then Nikolitch came to me looking angry and crestfallen.

" I'm sorry ; but they think you're afraid, Bergwyn," he said.

" I don't care a red cent what they think. Does the doctor say the Prince is fit to fight ? He can hardly stand ; look at him lurching there."

" Oh, Astic says he's all right : and he knows him."

" Then he takes the responsibility. I won't."

" He's only in a devil of a rage."

" Very well, then. I'm ready."

A minute later the word was given and we engaged. I had no lethargy left now. The last vestige of it vanished when I felt his blade pressing mine and met his scowl of positively devilish hate. I needed no more than a glance into his eyes to see that he had come out to kill me, and that my life depended upon my skill and coolness.

But he was either too ill or too angry to be really dangerous. He attacked me furiously from the start ; but he fought so wildly that I found myself quite able to hold him in check, and I let him exert himself to the utmost with the sure knowledge that in such a state he could not keep it up long.

I think he had reckoned upon being able to treat me with the same contempt as a swordsman as he had treated me as a man the night before ; and when he found out his mistake, it provoked his rage until he fought with the frenzy of a madman.

Soon he began to breathe hard. The pressure of his blade against mine weakened. Twice his foot slipped and he exposed himself dangerously ; and then I knew I was going to beat him.

I took no advantage of his slips. The man was ill, or drunk, or suffering from the effects of drink ; and I could not bring myself even to wound him.

I just kept to my tactics of wearing him down, defending myself when he attacked me and pressing him whenever he sought to ease off to get his breath back.

At last it became little more than a burlesque. He was so exhausted and so unsteady on his legs that he could scarcely continue the fight, scarcely hold his sword, indeed ; and when I realized this I made a big, pressing effort, and seizing my moment, whipped his sword out of his hand and left him gasping impotently in dismay and breathlessness and lurching like a discomfited, angry fool, until he began to clamour to renew the fight.

The seconds interfered at this, however ; even his own men protesting. I stood while they settled it ; and then turned away to dress.

Nikolitch was loud in praises of me as I put on my coat, but regretted I had not wounded him ; as he might want to have another meeting.

"I shouldn't meet him again. It's an additional insult that he should have come out in such a state. And you'd better let him know I shan't meet him again. If he monkeys with me again I'll settle it in a more American fashion ; and if there's to be another fight of the kind, it shall begin where this morning's has ended."

To my astonishment Nikolitch carried the message to one of the Prince's seconds, and then we left the ground and drove back to the city.

I kept Nikolitch and Captain Astic to breakfast, and they could speak of nothing but the fight ; criticizing it with almost as much fond enthusiasm as if they had been experts describing a good game of baseball.

I was glad when they left me, indeed, and I could settle down to a quiet review of the situation. Nikolitch was to see me again in the afternoon ; and he declared joyously and with a certain air of rather self-congratulatory importance, that they would both have a busy time in seeing that a true account of the duel was spread about.

"You are a fortunate man, Mr. Bergwyn, and will be a popular one," said Captain Astic. "The Prince is thoroughly well hated and people will be ready to make much of you."

I did not regard it at all in that light. It was Gatrina's good-will, not that of the crowd, which I sought; and I felt she would hear with strong prejudice that I had allowed myself to be drawn into a quarrel which she would know well enough could only have arisen on her account.

Estranged as she already was by this monstrous story of my secret understanding with Elma, she would be quite incapable of appreciating my motives or feelings; and the fact that I could not get to her to explain everything irritated me almost beyond endurance.

It was my helplessness in that direction which tried me more than anything. She had set up a barrier between us which I could not break through. There was nothing I could do but fret and fume and pace up and down the room and down and up again, in vain imaginings as to how things were to end.

To an active temperament like mine nothing could be more galling. Prompt decision and action were mental instincts with me.

Do something I must; so I made an effort to see Gatrina, and pushed it until I met with a very ugly rebuff. I was told she was out, and I declared I would wait until she returned.

I waited, and waited, and waited until my patience was exhausted, only to be told by her servants that while I had been waiting she had returned and gone out again without seeing me.

I went home and wrote to her that I must see her on a matter of the most urgent importance. I gave the letter to Buller with instructions to place it personally in Gatrina's hands.

An hour and more passed, and when he came he brought a reply in her handwriting. I tore the envelope open

and my own letter, unopened, was enclosed and with it a cutting from a paper of that morning's date, announcing in guarded terms my engagement to Elma.

At first I flushed with mortification and resentment, but then caught a glimpse of light.

If it was really the lie about Elma which had estranged her, I had but to get the truth to her to change that anger and make her feel the injustice she had done me.

I cast about for the means. She would neither see me nor read my letters; so that I must find some one who could get access to her.

I thought instantly of Nikolitch, but he did not come at the time he had appointed, and when I went to his rooms in search of him, I heard that he had been sent away on military business and would not return until night or the next morning.

So the whole day passed without anything being done to kill the lie which was having such ominous results for me.

It was noon on the next day when I saw Nikolitch; and very anxious and disturbed he looked.

"I have grave news for you, Bergwyn," he said at once. "The officers are going to move at once and a day or two, perhaps an hour or two, will find the crisis here."

"I want to see you about something else," I said, eagerly.

"My news first," he replied. "Before anything else, you must know it. I fear that that condition of no violence will not be kept."

Instantly my thoughts were for Gatrina and I chilled with fear for her.

"Speak plainly, Nikolitch."

"I have come back at some risk to do so. I have only the worst to report. We moderates have been outvoted."

CHAPTER XXII

THE SCENT OF PERIL

"I GOT a scent of the trouble yesterday," said Nikolitch after a pause, long enough to try my patience severely; "and should have come to you at once, but I was sent out of the city to Jagodina with part of the regiment. I dared not write to you for fear the letter got into wrong hands."

"What did you hear, and how?"

"You know there have been many changes made in the regiments here; and no one could understand the reason for them. But I believe I know it now. Those officers who are against force have been gradually sent out of the city and their places filled by men of the opposite views. Yesterday an excuse was made that some manœuvres were to be held round Jagodina; and by means of it nearly all of the no-violence men were sent away—myself amongst them; while others have been moved in. You can guess the object—a *coup d'état*."

"And Petrosch?"

"Was like a sphinx when I managed to see him yesterday. Denied the idea of force, referred to the arrangement with you; but would not say a word as to what was intended. He pleaded entire ignorance."

"What will happen?"

"I cannot say. We discussed it all last night at Jagodina, and the impression there is that some most drastic steps have been decided secretly and that we were being got out of the way for them to be carried out."

"What kind of violence do you anticipate?"

"God knows," he exclaimed, throwing up his hands, almost despairingly.

"We must see Petrosch."

"I dare not. I am supposed to be in Jagodina. I got leave of absence because the chief is very friendly, but he said I must not come to Belgrade. He meant

I mustn't let him know if I did. So I said I wished to go to Alexinat. But I felt I must get the news to you somehow; so I came here secretly. I shall be broken if my presence is known."

"Won't you stay and see it through, now you are here?"

"I owe you no less, Bergwyn, let happen what will. I have got you into it. But I should prefer not to go outside this house if we can help it."

"I wanted you to do me a great service, And it is more important now than ever, if what you think is true."

"What is it?"

"To go to the Princess Gatrina."

"I have thought of her. That's largely why I came—after what you told me about the hill business."

"You think she would be in danger?"

"How can it be otherwise? But of course it depends on what is going to happen. You must warn her."

"That's just it. She won't see me, wouldn't read a letter I sent asking her to see me. I hoped you would be able to help me."

He hesitated a moment. "Of course I will," he said then. "The thing's too grave to let any personal considerations weigh with me. She must be persuaded to leave the city—at least until the officers have carried out their plan."

"She won't go."

"She must, or the worst may happen to her."

"I'll go to Petrosch myself at once, while you go to the Princess. I think she will receive you. What I want you particularly to do with her is persuade her that there is no foundation for this statement"; and I put the newspaper cutting in his hand.

He read it and looked up. "Is it a time to think of this?" he asked.

"Yes; because when that is contradicted she may consent to see me and I can add my influence to persuade her to seek safety in flight."

"Would they let her go?" he asked.

"Get her consent and I'll do the rest."

"Send your man to my rooms for clothes. I mustn't be seen in these"; and he showed me that under a long overcoat he was wearing his uniform.

I rang for Buller and gave him instructions, and then called upon Colonel Petrosch, who cordially welcomed me.

"I wish to see you very particularly, Colonel," I said, without beating about the bush, and recited to him the alarming news given me by Nikolitch.

"To a certain extent you are right, Mr. Bergwyn," he answered slowly. "I had better tell you something. Since I saw you, a formal demand has been made to the King to abdicate, backed by the statement 'that a refusal would be followed by the declaration of the army against him.' At first he refused; but afterwards asked for time to consider the matter. A week was conceded and there the matter was left."

"Then nothing will be done for a week?"

"Nothing *would* have been done; but His Majesty or the Government, most probably the Queen, has broken faith. Of those who waited upon him—there were five—three have been arrested and thrown into prison. Naturally the army is embittered."

"What will be done?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "For whatever happens now, the blame will lie with the Court."

"I suppose that's about as hopeless news as you could give me,"

"It is not good," he replied, very grave.

"You are still in a position to keep the condition of no violence."

"We have decided to release you from your undertaking so that we may not even appear to be guilty of bad faith. The decision has just been made; and I should have written you at once or seen you, to return you this paper"; and he put my letter back into my hands.

Nothing that he could have said or done would have so deeply impressed me as that.

"I won't disguise from you that you have alarmed me greatly."

"Is there a man in the country at the present time who does not view the future with alarm? The issues are too fateful for all classes, Mr. Bergwyn. But if you are speaking in contemplation of any sort of financial business, I would advise you strongly to hold your hand and wait."

"How long?"

"Until the new Government is established, the new King crowned and the country once more settled."

"The new King?" I asked quickly.

"The succession will revert to the Karageorgevics."

"And Princess Gatrina?"

"It is very unfortunate for her and her friends that she still remains in the city." He spoke with impressive deliberation.

"It is largely on her account I have been influenced in what I have done."

"So I have gathered for myself, Mr. Bergwyn; and so I have thought, despite the contradictory rumours which have reached me concerning you both—and others."

"Can you give me no assurance that at least she will be in no personal danger?"

He paused a long time to think. "Personally I will do everything in my power. You have met me so frankly that you deserve no less. You may rely upon me to do my utmost; but although I shall of course have considerable influence, I am but one of many."

"She would be allowed to leave the city?"

"Her departure would be welcome if she would go at once."

"And if she stays?"

"She may carry her life in her hands, Mr. Bergwyn."

"But I could still depend upon your influence?"

"To the utmost shred. I give you my honour."

I rose to go then. "I need not assure you that I shall treat in confidence what you have said, Colonel Petrosch."

I drove back to my house feverishly anxious now to hear how Nikolitch had fared with Gatrina. But he had not returned and I sat eating out my heart with impatience at his delay. He was so long that I began to fear he might have been arrested for having come to the city in defiance of his orders, and I sent Buller at length to the Princess's house for news of him.

A line came back from him.

"She is away. I am waiting for her return."

I scribbled a reply to this.

"I have had the worst confirmed. For God's sake do all you can"; and this I sent back to him by Buller.

The suspense of the time that followed was agony. My alarm for her took a hundred crude and wild shapes as I thought of the peril that would encircle her when the desperate schemes of the army were once put in operation.

I was maddening myself with such thoughts when Buller brought me Elma's card. I sent a curt message that I would not see her. I felt I could not trust myself in that desperate mood.

But he came back with a note.

"You must see me. I have terrible news affecting Gatrina's safety."

I went to her then. In such a cause I was ready to go anywhere and do anything. She was more serious than I had seen her before, and spoke without any of the affectations customary with her.

"There must be peace between us, Mr. Bergwyn,"

"What have you come for?"

"Gatrina is in danger and you must help to save her."

"What is your news?"

"A revolution is imminent, and if Gatrina is in the city when it breaks out, she will be involved. The King has been told he must abdicate, and a conflict between

him and the army is now certain. She must be got to a place of safety."

"Why do you come to me?"

"Because you can prevail with her."

"On the contrary, you have made that impossible. You know how—by the false tale you told before the Queen."

"It can be contradicted. I will contradict it if you agree."

"Agree to what?"

"To unite with us in saving her to take the Throne."

"You mean to marry the Duke Barinski?"

"I mean, first, to save her life. This is no time to think of any personal ends. She is necessary to the country."

"She has no chance of succeeding to the Throne. I know that. I know what is to be done."

"You can help us if you will. Get her to trust herself to us instead of to the Court, and we will be responsible for her safety."

"How? Another case of Maglai?"

"You need not sneer. I did not mean that. She would be safe under the protection of the Russian flag."

"With you as her chief adviser and friend. I should not deem that safety; nor would she."

"You abandon her then to her fate?"

"I will not counsel her to play the part of cat's paw for Russia."

"Even to save her life?"

"Will you undo the mischief you have caused and let her know the truth? Then I will act with you to this extent. If I can, I will prevail with her to leave the country for a time and from a position of freedom, decide whether to make this marriage or not."

"She must not leave the country. She must be here when the moment of crisis arrives, and the future occupant of the Throne has to be chosen. Her absence then might be fatal to everything."

"Go to her and tell her that all you said was untrue and why you said it, and leave the decision to her."

"You are still dreaming of the impossible. I have shown her most of your old letters to me."

"Then you had better tell your Russian employers how you have succeeded in wrecking their schemes."

She paused in considerable embarrassment.

"You must have some other aim, however," I continued. "You have contradicted yourself. You said at first that I still had influence with her: now that you have kept your word and broken her trust in me; and yet that you need my help. You will not be surprised that I find it difficult to believe you at all—except as a power for mischief and wrong."

"You do not seem to realize her peril."

"And you do not explain your inconsistency."

"I will make it all plain to her."

"So that I may go to counsel her to marry another man. I will not."

"Not even to save her life?"

"You said that before. I will find means to save her life, if it should be really in danger."

"What I have proposed is the only way."

"You may think so. I will find another. I do not trust either you or your employers. You can help me by undoing what you have done and telling her the truth—by that means you can aid in saving her life. But with your help or without, I will find the means."

"You are very bitter against me."

"I speak the truth and the truth may well have a bitter sound."

"If you refuse me, the responsibility for what may occur will be yours."

"Will you go to her and admit the falsehood?"

"If you agree to my terms. Not otherwise."

"That was the answer I expected," I said as I rose and opened the door for her to leave.

"Do you mean to render me desperate? You under-

estimate my power to revenge myself. You will drive me to take a course which even I might afterwards regret. I am not yet Gatrina's enemy; but . . ." a very angry glance finished the sentence.

"We shall do better to end this," I answered, curtly, meeting her look as I held the door for her.

"You will be well advised for your own and her sake if I find you in a different mood to-morrow"; and with this threat she went.

For her threat I cared little enough; and the only part of the interview which made any impression was the confirmation she had brought of the coming trouble.

I was thinking this round when Nikolitch returned.

"Well?" I asked eagerly.

He shook his head. "I have done no good," he said.

My heart fell at the words. The last chance had failed, and I knew by my pang of disappointment how much I had built upon my friend's mission.

CHAPTER XXIII

A PLAN OF DEFENCE

It was some time before I could even bring myself to ask Nikolitch for details of his visit to Gatrina.

"You saw the Princess?" I asked at length.

"I would not come away without. She had been at the Palace, I think. She received me graciously at first and listened while I warned her that grave troubles were coming. Then something I said suggested to her that I had come from you; and her manner changed suddenly."

"It would, I suppose," I interjected, bitterly.

"She put the question point blank, and I admitted it, of course. Then she refused to hear any more. At the door she turned, her face very pale, her manner and tone cold as ice. 'Under the circumstances, Captain Nikolitch, your presence is an insult,' she said. And never in my life have I felt the lash of a woman's tongue more keenly. I suppose she was mad

you had told me anything of how matters stood with you. I felt like a whipped cur as I stumbled out of the room."

"Well, it's just a devil of a mess, that's all, and we'll have to find some way of helping her against her will. Would God I could but learn when the devilment is to be done?"

"I think I could learn that. Not here, of course, where if I were recognized I should be clapped straight away under arrest; but at Jagodina. They will know there."

"Then for Heaven's sake get back to Jagodina at once and send me word. I will do the rest. I begin to see a way at last—if she will but stay in her own house."

"What is it?" he asked eagerly.

"No, no. Don't stay another minute in the city. Get to your regiment and send me the news I want. Just the time; that's all; that's all. It may not be safe to send more"; and seizing a time table I found there was a train he could catch at once, and I hurried him off.

"My uniform," he said. "I'm in mufti."

"Leave it. It may be useful."

"What do you mean?" he asked, anxiously.

"If I don't tell you, you can't be compromised. Do as I ask; that's all. And for Heaven's sake be off at once."

I infected him with a degree of my own energy and bundled him off to the dépôt, and sent Buller with him with instructions to get him a special train if he missed the regular one.

Then I gave word that the instant Karasch arrived he was to be shown to me; it was close to the hour at which he was accustomed to come for instructions; and having done that I set to work to think out my plan as I ate a hasty dinner.

The plan was a very simple one—to raise immediately a band of men numerous enough to protect Gatrina's

house in case of emergency, and to find some place close to it where they could remain in readiness under Karasch's leadership.

"There is work for you at last, Karasch," I said to him as soon as he arrived; "difficult, and perhaps dangerous; and I am going to trust to you."

"I will do my best, whatever it be," he answered, with his customary directness.

"Ugly things are going to occur in the city; a revolution, accompanied probably with violence, is on the eve of taking place; and no one can say for certain what will or will not happen. But it is very probable that the Princess—Mademoiselle, you know—will be exposed to great danger, and I wish you to help me in protecting her. You will do this?"

"With my life. Of course you have a plan."

"Yes. I mean you to get together a strong band of resolute men to be instantly available to form a guard round her house. They must be men on whom we can depend, and we will pay them liberally. How many can you get?"

"I could get five or six who would be reliable."

I thought a moment. "Could you trust them absolutely?" I asked.

"Yes; as you may trust me. But, I beg your pardon, why cannot the Princess remove to a place of safety?"

"She will not, for reasons I cannot explain to you. For one thing she does not know of her danger, and will not believe in it."

"Mademoiselle has a strong will, we know," he said, with a shrug of his broad shoulders.

"She has, therefore, to be saved despite herself. Stay, I have it," I exclaimed as a thought struck me. "You say these five or six men are to be relied upon. Could you procure half a dozen uniforms for them to wear?"

"I could get half a hundred, but——"

"This is my plan, then. Get the other men, fifty or a hundred of them—as many as you can—to be

available if the only trouble comes from the mob and not from the soldiery. The six we will make up as soldiers, and at the worst we will force our way with them into the house and bring off the Princess as though she were our prisoner."

He chewed the notion for a moment and then his grim face relaxed into one of his rare smiles. "It is good," he said; and we set to work and threshed out the plan in as much detail as practicable at that stage.

I decided that the half-dozen men who with Karasch and myself were to take the risk of making the pretended arrest of Gatrina, should wear the uniform of soldiers and over that loose civilian's clothes which could be easily slipped off in case of need. The men would in this way be available for both parts of the work before us: as civilians to resist the mob, or as soldiers to mislead the regular troops.

I based my plans on the calculation that in making any attempt on Gatrina's house the troops were not likely to be in any considerable force. The movement would be more in the nature of an arrest; and if we could manage to get into the house before the soldiers sent to make the arrest, they would be likely to conclude, if they saw Gatrina in our hands, that in the confusion some mistake had been made in doubling the parties told off for the purpose.

I should be in command and should wear the uniform which Nikolitch had left behind him; and in the event of any complication arising, I should have to trust to my wits to explain it away.

My intention was to march with Gatrina straight to the house of the United States representative, where, of course, she would be safe.

Karasch went off to find the men and was to return at midnight to report progress; and I was to go out into the neighbourhood of Gatrina's house to look for a place in which they could be placed. I was getting ready when my eye fell upon Nikolitch's uniform and I

tried it on. It was anything but comfortable after the freedom of civilian's dress ; and as I was much the broader man of the two, it was an uncommonly bad fit.

But I had to get used to it ; so I resolved on a dress rehearsal of the part, and throwing on a long overcoat, I put a revolver in my pocket and set out on my quest, with Chris in close attendance at my heels.

The night was fine but moonless ; and as the streets of Belgrade were very badly lighted, there was not much chance of my being recognized. The restaurants and supper houses were busy enough, and the flare of their lights streamed across the streets here and there ; but they were easy to avoid ; and there were none of them in the neighbourhood of Gatrina's house.

As it was of course necessary that I should make myself as familiar with the entrances to the house as possible, I had a good look at it, being careful to keep well in shadow.

A massive stone house, it stood by itself at a corner and was almost surrounded by a high wall. The main door let out on to a broad thoroughfare ; a strong massive door with a deep portico. In the wall at the side there was a smaller doorway—the servants' entrance, I concluded ; and this, also, was very heavily and strongly fashioned.

It was altogether a house capable of offering stout resistance to any attack ; and I saw in a moment that if I could once get inside, with a few resolute men, it would be possible to hold it for a long time against either mob or troops ; and I concluded that, in common with many others in the city, it had been strengthened in view of the turbulent outbreaks which had been frequent enough in Belgrade.

The strength of the house reassured me somewhat until I found a weak spot. Some fifty yards along the smaller street were the stables ; and I remembered that when I had been in the house on the previous day waiting in my vain attempt to see Gatrina, I had noticed

a newly made door at the end of the garden, just at the point where, as I could now see, it would lead to the stables; while from the room where I had been placed, a French window, quite unprotected, led down a flight of steps to the garden path.

That was a weak spot indeed. But if it would render the house open to attack, it would also provide the means by which I could gain access if the need arose.

I was weighing all this in my mind most earnestly as I stood opposite the entrance to the stable, when Chris moved and growled. I silenced him, laying my hand on his head, and drew back with him into the deep shadow of a tree which stood in front of the portico of a house, and listened.

He never warned me without cause; and soon I caught the sound of approaching footsteps. I had no wish to be seen, so I slipped into the portico and pressed close against the wall, while I kept watch on the newcomer. He came along at a quick pace until he reached the stable, when he paused.

Presently he came out into the roadway and stared at the upper windows of the house. Then he went round to the front and again he paused and stared up at the windows there; and apparently not seeing what he sought—for the whole house was now in darkness—he scratched his head as if in perplexity, and came sauntering back toward the stables.

He was very slow in his movements, and his slowness irritated me. Presently a light showed for an instant in one of the top windows at the back, and was almost instantly extinguished. This was repeated twice, at short intervals; and I heard the window raised very cautiously.

It was evidently the signal for which the man in the street had been waiting, for he whistled, just two notes softly, showed himself in the roadway and then stepped back in the shadow of the stables and waited.

After some minutes, a small door in the large stable gate was opened and a man looked out. I could see all

that passed by the light of a lamp over the gates. The two whispered together a moment ; and then the man from the house came out, turned the key in the lock, and put it in his pocket.

They both crossed the road toward where I stood, and I pressed yet closer against the wall and kept my hand on Chris's head lest by a sound he should betray our presence. They did not enter the portico, but stood in the shadow of the tree where I had first concealed myself.

" This will do," I heard one of them say ; and then strain my ears as I would I could not catch any other than isolated words. But they were enough to set me on fire. " Army," " Arrest," " Three hours," " Yes, two o'clock—" this was louder and in an impatient tone. After that there was a chink of money passing ; and then they both walked away along the street.

My first inclination was to follow them at once and force an explanation ; but I checked the impulse. I resolved to wait for the return of the servant. He was sure to come back, if I read the thing aright. I could deal with him alone much more satisfactorily.

I took Chris across to the stable gates and making him understand that he was on guard and must let no one pass in, I returned to my hiding-place.

At length the man reappeared. When he reached the stable gates, Chris received him with a low growl, and he started back in some dismay at the most unexpected interruption.

He was trying to pacify the dog with a little coaxing when I crossed to him and, assuming a tone of authority, asked, at a venture : " You have seen the sergeant ? Why have you been so long ? "

He was obviously in much perplexity and some fear, and glanced from Chris to me. The good dog looked formidable enough to have frightened a braver man.

" Who are you ? " he asked.

I threw back my long coat and showed my uniform.

"The plan is changed. You are to come with me. We can't trust you out of sight again."

He glanced round as if meditating flight.

"The dog will pull you down if you move," I said, sternly.

"I must get in," he murmured. "I shall keep my word."

"Did you hear what I ordered you?" I rapped back with an oath. "Come," and I linked my arm in his to drag him away. He resisted at first; but a word from me Chris showed his fangs and snarled so angrily that no resistance was left in him. I let go his arm then. "A false step or a single word, and the dog's fangs will close on your throat," I muttered fiercely.

He came then, keeping pace anxiously with my quick stride and glancing ever and again over his shoulder at Chris who stalked behind him like a black shadow.

I got him to my house without trouble; for the streets were now all but deserted, and I chose a way which avoided the main roads.

I led him into my study, taking Chris with me, and then turned a lamp full on his face. Then I drew my revolver and held it in his full view as I considered how best to question him, so as to get the truth out of him.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE NIGHT OF TERROR

THE fear which my prisoner displayed led me to prolong the interval before I questioned him. It was essential for my purpose that he should be thoroughly frightened; and the suspense was enough to try much stouter nerves than his. I let him have some two or three minutes, therefore, so that his fears should have full scope; and just as my first question was on my lips, a happy thought occurred to me. I saw that I could make valuable use of the Russian reputation for doing ugly things.

He was more likely to fear the Russians than any

other party concerned ; and if I could make him believe he had now fallen into their hands, he would be far more likely to answer my questions than if I played the more difficult part of an army officer, believing him false to the army.

"Stand over there," I cried, sternly and suddenly in Russian, pointing to the wall ; and the start he gave at hearing the unwelcome language, proved to me that I was right. He moved to where I pointed, his eyes on me all the time. "Attempt to move and the dog will be on you," I added, as brutally as I could.

"You speak my language ? " I jerked out in Russian.

"I understand it a little," he answered with difficulty.

"Then we'll use your own cursed tongue," I said in Serb. "I have no time to waste over you, so if you don't answer plainly I'll find means to make you. How much money did that soldier give you just now ? "

He started at finding I knew this and looked about for a lie. "Money ? I don't understand your Excellency."

"It's in that pocket." I pointed to where I had seen him place it. "Take it out, you lying dog. Quick," I thundered, as he still hesitated. "I know everything."

Slowly, for it cost him a pang to part with it, he drew out the bundle of bills. "It is my own," he faltered.

"The gold, too. Quick."

Again he trembled, but dared not refuse. I had now impressed upon him that I knew his secrets.

"Put it there," I said, pointing to a chair. "Now, I'll test your power of speaking the truth. What was that money paid for ? "

He stared at me in a sweat of fear, trying to moisten his parched lips with a tongue as dry as leather, wishing to lie but yet afraid ; and in his fright unable to coin a plausible tale.

"It was money—owing to me," he stammered.

I paused a moment to let him hope the lie had imposed upon me ; and then pointed to the bell. "If that bell is rung it will bring my men here with the

means you may have heard we use to make prisoners speak the truth. Go and ring it now—or tell me the truth of your own accord.”

It was a touch of refined cruelty eloquent of Russian methods to make him summon his own torturers; and it did much to carry conviction now.

“I don’t wish to deceive your Excellency,” he murmured.

“Is that why you want me to believe that when a man owes you money he comes in the dead of night to pay it after waiting for your signals from the house—the light three times flashed. You lying cur. Ring that bell—I have no more time to waste.”

“You won’t torture me?” he cried, in anguish.

“Ring that bell,” I thundered. “It pleases me for you yourself to call your torturers”; and I laughed, as if the grim joke were really to my taste.

Down he went on his knees. “Not the torture, Excellency. Not the torture. For God’s sake, not that.”

“You’ve had a taste of it before, eh?” I said, with another grin, feeling an awful beast as I did it. “You can choose—the torture or the truth of your own will.”

“My God!” he exclaimed, covering his white face and writhing; and then the truth came slowly and with labour, as he thought how little he dared to tell and yet save his skin. “I was paid to let the soldiers into the house at two o’clock in the morning.”

“For what purpose?”

“To arrest the Princess. Oh, my God, my God,” he cried and burst into tears.

“Do you know what’s going to happen to-night—the night you’ve chosen for this infamy?”

“N—no. Yes,” he changed his words almost eagerly as he caught my eye.

“Give it words then.”

“They told me it was for her safety, Excellency. They did, they did, I swear they did, on my soul. When the King and Queen and the others are taken from the

Palace, the Princess would be in danger in her house, and they mean to put her in a place of safety."

This was news, indeed; and in my consternation at hearing it, this coward and his treachery became of little importance. I did not doubt he was speaking the truth about that, whatever his own motives may have been for his act. And then a plan occurred to me.

"How many men were to carry out the arrest?"

"I don't know—only a few; four or five at most, we have no means of resisting them in the house."

"You are to let them in by the stable door?"

"Yes, at two o'clock. They could force their way in even without my help."

I paid no heed to his attempt at exculpation. "What is your name? The name they know you by?"

"Michel."

"How many men servants are in the house?"

"Two besides myself. Two are away, Excellency."

"Any one sleeping in the stables?"

"No one, Excellency."

"Any of the others know of your plan?"

"No, Excellency."

"You have the key of that stable door. Give it me."

He handed it over with a deep sigh.

"You have saved your skin," I said curtly; "but you must remain here. You will be safe, if you make no effort to resist. If you do that, I shall leave orders that you are to be shot." I said this much as though it were my daily custom to catch men and murder them; and the very tone I used added to his fears.

I left him a minute in the care of Chris; and as Karasch had arrived I told him to have the man bound and locked up in the basement of the house.

I was glad to be relieved of his presence, and then set to work to carry out the scheme which his story had suggested. When Karasch came back I told him what I had learnt, and asked him how he had fared.

"Except the handful of men on whom I knew I could trust, I have done little," he said.

"They may be enough for my altered plans. Can you get them to-night, and above all can you get uniforms for them?"

"I fear not. It is past midnight."

"Get the men then. I'll find uniforms for them."

"My plan is to go to the Princess's house at once; to wait for the men who are coming to arrest her; make them prisoners and then play their part. They will be able to provide us with the costumes," I added, smiling grimly.

Then we discussed very hurriedly the plan and completed the preparations which had to be made.

I told him to meet me near the Princess's house with as many of the men as he could get together, and to bring with him a few lengths of stout cord for binding the soldiers we hoped to capture. That made clear, I packed him off to hunt up his men.

It was a desperate step I had resolved to take, and the penalty of failure would probably be serious. I realized that to the full; but on the other hand, I could see no other means of gaining my end.

I left my house about half an hour after midnight, having appointed with Karasch to be at the Princess's by half past one.

Having ample time, I resolved to make a detour and see if any movements were going on in the neighbourhood of the Palace. With Chris close at my heels I walked at a rapid pace.

The whole city appeared sunk in the slumber of unsuspecting security.

One o'clock was chimed as I came in view of the Palace; and save for the sentries pacing their rounds with mechanical steps, not a soul was to be seen.

There was absolutely nothing to suggest that a violent outbreak was on the very eve of consummation; and that a deed of horror was in the making, the shame of

which would before morning spread to the uttermost confines of the civilized world, to set men seeking its parallel in the darkest epochs of history.

On leaving the Palace I hurried toward one of the barracks ; and then, all suddenly, on turning the corner of one of the main streets, I heard the measured tramp of many feet ; and had just time to conceal myself in the gateway of a house, when a large body of troops passed me, marching in dead silence.

They numbered some hundreds, marching straight on the Palace ; and I knew then, indeed, that trouble was abroad and that my worst forebodings were to be realized.

When the troops had passed I slipped from my hiding-place and ran at utmost speed in the direction of Gatrina's house. It was nearly a quarter to two when I reached it, to find with intense satisfaction that all was still quiet there and that Karasch had arrived and was awaiting me with four companions.

Taking the utmost precaution to make sure we were unobserved, I unlocked the little door in the stable gates and we entered. Locking it behind me, and leaving the men at the end near the stable under the shadow of some trees, Karasch and I stole up the garden to the house, and found the unlocked door by which the spy had left.

The time was so short before we were to look for the coming of the soldiers that not a moment was to be lost in finding a place where we could carry out the plan of capture. Karasch, most thoughtfully, had brought a lantern with him, and stealing noiselessly through the passages, we explored the whole of the underpart of the house ; and I decided upon two large cellars and explained to him hurriedly how to act.

We would let the men in two at a time, Karasch guiding one, I the other ; and lead them each to a different cellar, where we would overpower and bind them. All would be in darkness on the plea that suspicion had been aroused in the house and any light would be dangerous ;

and as each man entered the cellar he would be seized.

He fetched the men and by the light of the lantern I had a good look at each. They were a sturdy, resolute lot ; and when we explained the work to be done, they seemed to enter into it with willingness and determination.

The traps were in readiness before the hour struck, and Karasch and I went out again to the stable gate to wait for the soldiers.

We stood in deep shadow and I then told him what I had seen in the streets.

"The city will soon wake," he muttered. "And if the people side with the troops, as I believe they will, we shall soon have the mob here."

"It will at least convince the Princess of the need to fly." I sought hard to persuade myself of this ; for my chief fear was that Gatrina herself would yet prove the greatest difficulty.

We stood in silence for many minutes and now and again the sound of hurrying footsteps without told us that the news of the doings at the Palace was spreading and that the people were scurrying to learn what was going forward.

"They are late," muttered Karasch, impatiently more than once ; and then : "They are coming," he declared, as his quick ear caught the sound of slower footsteps before I heard anything.

I soon heard them, however. They halted outside the gates ; and some one knocked. I opened the little door a couple of inches and peered through.

There were six of them only.

"Is that you, Michel ?" came a whisper.

"Hsh. Yes. How many are there of you ?"

"Six."

"There is danger. I am suspected. You must enter two at a time. I daren't let you all pass together through the garden. Cautiously, my friend, cautiously," I said, as some one tried to force the door.

A consultation was held, and the man who had spoken to me explained to the rest what I had said.

Two men slipped through the door as I held it ; and the instant the second was through, I locked it behind him.

"Follow us," I said, not giving either of them time to see my face ; and we led them to the house. "Give me your hand," I told the man with me. "We daren't have a light, and the place is pitch dark."

He suspected nothing and I led him into the cellar, clapping my hand on his mouth as he entered, while the two men in waiting seized him and in less than a minute he lay bound and gagged. The other had been dealt with in the same way.

Karasch and I went back to the stables ; but the time occupied, swiftly as we had acted, had roused some kind of suspicion ; and when I opened the little door, one of the men thrust the butt of his musket in the way and despite my strenuous efforts, before I could close it all four had forced themselves through.

"We'll go in together, my man," said one of them, linking his arm in mine and holding me firmly. Another man did the same to Karasch.

It spelt crisis ; and for a moment or two I breathed hard. My fingers closed round my revolver, and his life hung by a much thinner thread than he dreamt.

I stood fighting with the impulse and thus the chance passed.

"See if he's armed," cried the soldier, and his companion plunged a hand into my pocket and wrenched my weapon roughly from me. Karasch was served in the same way ; and from the confidence of success we were thus suddenly brought face to face with the threat of disastrous failure.

CHAPTER XXV

IN GATRINA'S HOUSE

IN the moment of crisis Karasch took his cue from me and neither resisted nor protested against the soldiers'

conduct. I knew, however, that he would watch me closely and be prepared to help the moment I had decided what to do.

"I don't know why you've done this," I said to the man who held me and had given the orders. "I kept faith with you and you arrest me in return for it."

"We can do without you now ; and mean to see you give no trouble," was the answer.

"Very well ; but if you cross the garden in a body like this, there'll be no call for me to give it you ; you'll find it yourself. You'll be seen ; the alarm will be given, and you may look out for resistance."

"Who is there to resist, fool-head ? There are only three men in the house, and we've got two of you here," he growled with a chuckle at his own cunning. "You come with us to the house ; that's all you've got to do ; and come quietly, or maybe you won't reach it."

With that we moved on along the garden and I was in a fever of apprehension lest we should be seen by some one in the house. But the inmates were apparently fast asleep, and we reached the entrance without being observed.

This increased my captors' suspicions.

"I thought your caution was overdone, friend spy," he said.

"Then you're a fool," I answered, bluntly. "There's a dog about and if he scents you, he'll soon let every one know. You'd better let me keep him quiet." I had told Chris to stay, and knew he would remain till I called him.

We had entered the house then and stood in the broad, stone-flagged passage ; and I spoke loud enough to warn our men in the cellars beyond. I and the two men holding me were in advance and Karasch and the others close behind.

"You hold your tongue. I'm in command here," said the soldier in a bullying tone.

"You've made prisoners of us ; so you must do as you will. But I won't stand this treatment."

"Where are my two men?"

"I left them close here. I suppose they've gone on into the house."

"It's as dark as hell," growled the fellow. "Can you see anything, Andreas?" he asked his companion.

"Nothing but the dark," was the answer with an oath.

"You can get a light in the room first door to the right," I said. This was where I had left Chris, and if he went to it I knew the dog would put him out of the reckoning. But he smelt a trick and would not.

"No, thank you, Mr. Spy. Where we go, you come too. I can't make out where the devil the others are. What does it mean?" and he called the men by name.

"Hadn't you better ring the alarm bell, while you're about it?" I sneered. "You'll rouse every one more quickly."

"Curse the dark. Lead to where I can get a light," he muttered. "No tricks, mind, or you'll regret it."

His grip tightened on my arm and we moved forward abreast. But the door was too narrow to admit us all at once and he entered the room first.

"Seize him, Chris," I said in English; and out of the gloom the huge black form sprang at him with a fierce growl. In his consternation the soldier loosed his hold of me to battle with the dog, and in a moment my hand was on his companion's throat, while I called to the men in the cellars to go to the help of Karasch who was now fighting and struggling with his two guards.

We were six to three, for Chris kept the leader busy; and the desperate struggle in the darkness was soon over. The soldiers fought gamely enough; but they had no chance against such odds. We overpowered them, but it was not until some hard blows had been given and taken on both sides.

I was most afraid for the man whom Chris had attacked; but when I went to him was relieved to find that no serious harm had been done. He was terribly frightened; as well he might be, for Chris was an antagonist few men

would care to fight. But having got him down the good dog had not mauled him. The soldier lay flat on the ground, with Chris standing guard over him and growling fiercely whenever the man made the slightest movement.

"Call this brute off for God's sake," he said, in a frightened voice as I approached, lantern in hand.

"It serves you right for the trick you played me," I answered. "Are you hurt?" and I called Chris away.

"I thought he'd kill me."

"Wouldn't have been much loss if he had," said I, as he sat up and began to feel himself all over.

"I'd like to shoot the brute. What does all this mean?"

"That you're my prisoner instead of my being yours. If you have any weapons put 'em out—or I'll let the dog find them."

He glanced round fearsomely at Chris, who snarled.

"I have none."

"Then we'll tie you up like the rest of your men," I answered; and tied up he was. "I shall leave you here," I told him. "The dog will be on watch if you try any tricks."

Our victory was complete; and it remained to see how we should use it. Karasch and the others set to work to take the soldiers' uniforms and put them on, while I tried to think what step to take next.

The noise made during the struggle was so great that I knew the household must have been roused, and while the men were getting into the soldiers' uniforms, I listened with considerable anxiety for some one to come down to us. No one came, however; and I concluded that those who had been aroused had also been so frightened that they preferred to stop where they were.

The difficulty of the position was increased by my reluctance to see Gatrina or be seen by her, if that could be in any way prevented. My plan was to play this burlesque of arresting her, and not to show my hand until she was housed safely in the care of the American

Minister. To do that I intended one of the four men whom Karasch had brought to act the part of leader ; and I trusted that in the confusion and alarm of the arrest, both Karasch and I might manage to pass unnoticed.

I was revolving all this in my thoughts when I heard a movement above stairs, and presently a man's voice called :

" Is that you, Michel ? What's the matter ? "

" Come down," I called in response ; but my voice startled him.

" Who are you ? "

" Michel wants you. There is trouble. Come down " ; but he would not. Instead of coming he went away ; and I heard the low murmur of voices as he spoke with some one else.

Lights showed then, and I heard people moving about. But I did not want the house to be lighted up, for fear of its attracting too much notice outside ; and I therefore called to my men to make haste with their dressing.

When they came I led the way upstairs to find the servants huddled together looking very scared ; the two men in front of them armed. At the sight of so many of us in uniform they uttered cries of surprise and alarm.

" Put those guns down," I said, in a tone of command. " Do as I say, and no harm will come to you."

The two men hesitated. " What do you want ? " asked one of them.

" Cover them," I said, stepping to one side, and up went my men's guns to their shoulders.

One of the women screamed and they all huddled back, while the men laid their weapons on the ground with discreet speed. At a sign from me the muskets were lowered.

" Put out most of those lights," I said next ; and the order was obeyed with a celerity that spoke volumes for the impression we had created. " Where is your mistress, the Princess Gatrina ? "

"In her rooms, sir," said one of the women servants.

"Tell her to dress at once. She is to come with us. Impress upon her that only her safety is being considered. Strange things are doing in the city and she cannot remain here."

The girl sped away up the broad stairs and I turned to Karasch to tell him my plan.

"The Princess will probably demand to see us; and as neither you nor I can go to her without being recognized, two of these must go. Pick them out."

He chose two, and I told them what to say. That we had been selected to protect the Princess and take her to a place where she would be safe until the trouble in the city had passed.

The maid came back and her message was pretty much what I had anticipated.

"Her highness will see you in a minute, sir. She wishes to know from whom you come; and declares she will not leave the house."

"Our orders are peremptory. In five minutes she must go with us," I replied, and she carried the message.

While we waited for the reply I heard one of the maids say to the other servants that the street in the front of the house was getting full of people.

We went and looked out. It was only too true; and that it probably had a very sinister meaning for us all I knew to my infinite concern.

The city was indeed awaking to a knowledge of the dread doings of the night of terror, and the crowd was beginning to gather here in expectation that the house would become the scene of some stirring and exciting act of the tragedy.

I noticed with relief, however, that no troops were present. None had been sent yet under the belief that Gatrina would be made prisoner by the handful of men whose parts we were now playing. But how long this belief would continue it was impossible to conjecture.

The need for haste was thus imperative; and I fretted

and worried at the delay she made, all unconscious as she was of the peril it meant to her and all.

The instant the five minutes' grace had expired, I sent the two men upstairs to bring her down, despatching one of the scared maid-servants to show them her room.

At that moment we heard sounds below and Chris growled and barked. Karasch and I, followed by the two men, ran down instantly and found trouble; one of the soldiers, carelessly bound, had wriggled out of his cords and liberated a companion; and as we reached the bottom of the stairs, the two were in the passage with the dog blocking the way to the door and snarling fiercely.

We rushed toward them, but they slipped into the room where Chris had had the fight with the leader; and slamming the door in our faces, set up a clatter loud enough to wake the dead.

Karasch and I dashed ourselves against the door and as we strained to force it, we heard the crash of glass.

"The garden, Karasch," I cried; and we unfastened the door and rushed out. Chris darted out with a growl and in a moment had brought one of the men to bay. The other fled toward the stable and we ran in pursuit of him. But he was a quick, agile fellow, and using the little door at the end as a means of escape, he sprang up it, mounted the wall and disappeared—to carry the news of our doings heaven alone knew where.

"Back to the house, Karasch. We must get away before that man can bring help." We took back his comrade, thrust him into a room, turned the key upon him, and hurried again up the stairs.

Matters were going against me in the house also; and I was beginning to realize that I had grievously bungled matters in choosing such a method to serve Gatrina.

She had done precisely what, if I had not been a dolt, I might have known a girl of her courage and resolution

would do. She had used the minutes of grace to barricade herself into the room.

The men were waiting for me with the story.

"She has fastened herself into her room, she and her maids, and we could hear them piling things against the door to keep us out. We tried to call your message through the door, but at first she wouldn't answer; and then she said she was quite safe where she was and would yield to nothing but force. We didn't like to force the door without your orders."

I clenched my hands in impotent chagrin. Had we been the soldiers whose part we were playing, there would have been little enough difficulty, of course; and a few minutes would have sufficed to break a way in and take her prisoner.

But force was out of the question for me; and I felt like a flustered fool as the infinitely precious moments slipped away one after another bringing perilously nearer the troops who would come hurrying to the house the instant the man who had escaped got his story to headquarters.

"Show me the Princess's room," I said, and followed by the men I ran up stairs and knocked on the panel of the door.

There was no answer. I knocked again.

"For God's sake open the door and come out," I said, eagerly.

Still there was no reply.

Every second was bringing the danger nearer—and it was growing to a double peril now; for Karasch brought me word that the mob was increasing fast in numbers and were growing so angry that it looked as though they would attack the house.

I clamoured again at the door and called out that there was imminent danger; but either she did not hear my voice because of the clamour of the people without, or hearing it, did not recognize the tone; and held it to be a ruse of the soldiers to induce her to open the door.

I hammered again at the door and called her in my loudest tones ; I told the servants of the peril in which she stood if we could not get her away, and urged them to join with me in appealing to her to yield. But it was all to no purpose. Not a word would she answer either to them or to me.

"Get me paper quickly," I told them ; and when one, a whitefaced girl, rushed away on the errand, I whistled up Chris and set him barking in the hope that she would hear him and know by the sound who was there.

Chris succeeded where I had failed.

"What is that ? " It was Gatrina's voice ; and hearing it the dog whined and barked joyfully.

"It is Chris," I called. "We are here to save you. Open the door at once."

"Who is that speaking ? "

"It is I, Burgwan," I replied, my voice unsteady in my excitement. "There is not a moment to lose."

"Where are the soldiers ? "

"I will explain all. For God's sake come or it will be too late. Every second is precious."

We heard them drag away something they had placed before the door ; and burning with impatience called again to them to make haste.

At that moment a loud knocking came at the front door of the house ; and one of Karasch's men came running to say that the soldiers were in the street.

"We daren't stay to be caught in these uniforms. We shall be shot off-hand at a time like this," he said ; and the others agreed.

"You'll be shot by me if you attempt to desert me now," I answered desperately. "Before any one can get in, we shall be away. Stop them, Karasch. In a few moments we shall all be away."

And there came the loud knocking and clanging of the bell, followed by the cries of the mob and another shower of stones at the house.

Unable to hold their courage longer my men turned and ran down the stairs helter-skelter.

There was a moment's calm without and in the silence the room door unlocked and Gatrina came out.

Not recognizing me for an instant in the surprise at seeing my officer's uniform, and Karasch by me dressed also as a soldier she started back as if fearing treachery ; but Chris rushed up to her and disarmed her fear.

" Would God you had come out before," I cried.

Before she could reply we heard the sound of a scuffle and two of the men came running back.

" We are too late. The soldiers are already in the house below," cried one, breathlessly. " We are as good as dead men."

Even Karasch changed colour at the news.

CHAPTER XXVI

CHRIS TO THE RESCUE

It was the delay which had been fatal to the plan. The minutes during which we had had to wait before Gatrina could be made to understand who we were and what our object was had just turned the balance against us.

" What dreadful thing has happened ? " she asked.

" I cannot spare a moment to explain. If you will play the part of being my prisoner there is yet a chance of getting away."

" I am sorry," she said, as her maid brought her a cloak and hat.

" Silence there," I cried in a loud voice. " Fall in. I am sorry my duty is so unpleasant, your highness ; but I can answer no questions. Forward."

I led the way motioning to Karasch to walk at Gatrina's side, with two of the men in front and two bringing up the rear. The women, thinking the thing real, began to weep.

I had heard the soldiers coming up, and they met us on the stairs. The only chance was to put as bold a

face as possible on the matter and with as much show of authority as I could assume, I said :

"Is the way from the house clear? I shall take the prisoner by the back through the garden."

I had expected to be faced by some of the men we had fought with earlier, but to my intense relief there were none but private soldiers and one sergeant; and on seeing my captain's uniform they stood aside and saluted.

"We have not been to the back of the house, captain," replied the sergeant.

"Is Colonel Petrosch here yet?" I asked this as I thought the mention of the name might impress him.

"No, sir."

"Who's in command of the soldiers in the front?"

"Lieutenant Bulver, captain."

"Is he in sufficient force to control the mob?"

"He has a strong body of troops, captain."

"What are you doing in the house?" I was curious to know whether the escape of the soldiers had anything to do with it.

"We were detailed to see if the arrest had yet been made, captain, and to assist you if necessary."

I breathed a little more freely.

"All I need is that the mob there be kept in the front of the house so that I can get away with the prisoner quietly at the back. That side street must be cleared of people."

"I'll have it done at once," and he went away.

In this way I got rid of him and his men; my hopes began to rise that Gatrina would be saved.

"We'll make for the garden at once," I said; and we hurried to the stables.

Until now Gatrina had not spoken to me, but we had to wait while the way was cleared and we stood side by side and a little apart from the rest.

"You have run a terrible risk, Mr. Bergwyn," she said.

"I have been in no danger ; and we shall get away all right."

"What has happened at the Palace ? "

"I don't know. I got wind of this intended arrest of you and came here in the hope of intercepting the soldiers. As I was on my way, a very large body of troops, some hundreds of men, passed me marching on the Palace. But what occurred after that I have no knowledge whatever."

She wrung her hands despairingly.

"Do you think—oh, God, it is maddening."

"It is the work of the army. I know so much. And I hope they have done no more than to force an abdication."

"You say that as if you feared—I know not what horrors."

"If we once get clear of this we shall find out what has occurred. Karasch, look over if we can go yet."

I was on fire with impatience to be away ; but Karasch reported that the street was not yet clear ?

"Is there no other way we could escape ? " I asked Gatrina.

She shook her head. "No, none," she replied.

"I dare not wait here, Karasch ; we shall be caught in a trap " ; and opening the door in the stable gates I looked out ; but only to shut it again quickly as I caught my breath in dismay at what I saw.

Another body of troops were coming towards us at the double, and by the side of the officer in command ran a man in his shirt sleeves. It was the soldier who had escaped from us.

"We are too late," I said, as calmly as I could speak. "There are more troops, Karasch, and that man is guiding them. We must go back to the house and try to get away from the front."

We hurried back through the garden, and before we reached the house the new-comers were already clamouring at the stable gates.

Dashing through the house I flung open the front door.

But that way was impossible. The very orders I had given, to have the crowd massed in the front of the house, had effectually barred the chance of escape.

I called Karasch and pointed to the hopelessness of the attempt.

"We can do nothing. You and the men must get away."

"And you?" he asked.

"I shall stay with the Princess."

"Then I stay too, with you," he said sturdily.

"No, you can do better. You can save us both. You and the others. You can pretend to carry a message from me to the lieutenant—that I want to speak to him; and then lose yourselves among the soldiers or in the crowd. Get away as far as you can, and find Colonel Petrosch. Tell him that my life is in danger and that he must come here if it is not to be lost. If he questions you, tell him plainly all I have done. Now go," and I half pushed him out of the house.

The rest were only too eager to be off, and I watched breathlessly as Karasch crossed the cleared space, spoke to a lieutenant, who looked over at me and after hesitating, walked toward me.

As he came, I saw Karasch and his men move back to the soldiers, push through the ranks, and disappear in the crowd behind them.

"What have you done?" asked Gatrina.

"I have sent for some one who may get us out of the mess I have been clever enough to get us into. I don't know what's going to happen first."

The lieutenant entered the house then.

"You wish to speak to me, captain?" he asked.

"It's just as well to you as to another. I'm only masquerading in this uniform. I am not an officer at all."

He stared at me open-mouthed in sheer amazement.

"No officer?" he stammered. "I don't understand."

"You soon will. There are those coming who will make it all plain to you. But having misled your men purposely, I wished to tell you; that's all." I spoke as coolly as though I had been announcing a mere business fact.

"The soldiers who were with you?" he asked then, glancing round as if in search of them.

"They are gone," I told him.

Then we heard a noise in the basement. Loud voices, the tramp of many feet, and a rush up the stairs.

"We'll wait for them here," I said to Gatrina, pointing to a room at the back of the house; and we three all went into it, Chris keeping close by her side.

"You are my prisoner, sir," said the lieutenant.

"I shall offer no resistance," I replied, making it sound as much like a concession on my part as I could.

I put a chair for Gatrina and she sat down, while I stood beside her.

The next minute the soldiers came crowding into the room with the sergeant and men whose uniforms we had taken in their midst. They were all talking at once and gesticulating at once angrily, making a sort of Babel of tongues, in which fierce denunciations of me were disquietingly loud and conspicuous.

The officer in charge of the new-comers exchanged a few words with the lieutenant, describing excitedly the heinous deed of which I had been guilty. I disliked the look of him intensely—a heavy, red-haired bully of a man, and when he addressed me he did so in a hectoring tone difficult to hear without anger.

"So we've arrived in time to take you red-handed, my fine fellow, eh?"

"Red-handed? In doing what?" I asked, meeting his beetle-browed stare firmly.

"Don't try to bluster with me. I'm the wrong man," he cried, hotly. "It won't pay you, I promise you."

"He was one of them, captain. I'll swear to him."

And that's the dog that flew at me," said the sergeant.

"Take the beast out and shoot it," ordered the captain, brutally.

Chris was in no immediate danger of that fate, however. Two of the soldiers went toward him, but he showed his great fangs and looked so dangerous, that they stopped and stepped back ; and no other volunteers offered for the job.

Angered at this the captain himself drew a revolver and pointed it at the dog, but I checkmated this by calling Chris round behind me.

"Don't you dare to interfere with my orders," cried the bully, furiously.

I answered this by putting myself right in the line of fire. "I will not have the dog shot in this way."

"The dog is in my house and under my protection," exclaimed Gatrina.

"You are my prisoners, both of you ; and as for you," he said, with a coarse sneer to Gatrina, "your day is done, and your protection will avail nothing. You'll find that out soon enough." But he put up his revolver ; and as we had gained the point, it wasn't policy to anger him further with the hot remonstrance that rose to my lips.

"Did this man give you his name ? " he asked the lieutenant, who shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. I think he was more than a little ashamed of his superior's manner. "What's your name, prisoner ? " demanded the captain next.

"I am perfectly willing to explain everything I have done ; but I should prefer to do so before a smaller audience."

"I dare say you would, but you're not in a position to choose. I settle that. Now answer my questions and don't try to lie to me."

The colour leapt to my face at this. "There is no need to insult me, captain. It will neither hurt my case, nor help yours."

"By God, if you don't answer me at once I'll have you marched down into the garden there and shot for a traitor and a cur."

I couldn't take that. It made me mad. Clipping my words short I answered, deliberately :

"I think that would be the better plan, then. It will at least free me from the presence of a cad and a bully ; and the lieutenant there will, I am sure, have the courage and justice to tell the truth of your act."

He swore a deep oath, beside himself with rage.

"Seize him," he shouted. "By God, seize him, and take him out and shoot him."

I was seized by three soldiers.

"Lieutenant, you will tell Colonel Petrosch how I, his personal friend, have been condemned without a hearing."

"Away with him," shouted the captain, stamping with rage. The men began to lead me away.

"This is murder, and shall not be done," cried Gatrina, jumping to her feet.

"Silence, woman," exclaimed the bully. "Your doom is near, too."

"I will not be silent while murder is being done. I call upon all of you to stop this murder. You, sir," turning to the lieutenant. "You will not——"

The captain, like a maniac in his fury at this interruption, drew his sword and shouting out a vile epithet, rushed at Gatrina, intending, I believe, to strike her down.

But Chris, whose ominous growl at my treatment I had had to pacify, went almost as mad at this as the bully himself and with a savage growl launched himself right at the captain's throat, bore him to the ground and pinned him down, despite the blows and kicks which the soldiers rained upon him.

"Loose him, Chris," I cried, fearing the man would be killed ; and at my voice he obeyed. Then, as he was looking up to me, one of the soldiers who had picked up the captain's sword slashed at the dog's leg and when

he dropped, the brute thrust the blade between his ribs.

With a cry of rage I broke from the men who held me and rushed to Chris, but Gatrina was before me.

"You coward!" she cried to the soldier, who stood half gloating, half dismayed at his act; and the next moment my fist crashed into his face, knocking him sprawling among his comrades.

As I bent over my gallant dog, my heart full of sadness and pity for him, I was seized again by the men, and such a scene of confusion and riot followed as baffles description.

They beat me, of course, and I was dragged back and held panting, struggling, straining, breathing out impotent threats, and cursing all who had had a hand in the cruel work, as I strove vainly to get again to the spot where Gatrina, white-faced and pitying, knelt by the dear dog who had so valiantly given his life to save her.

Another group had the bully of a captain for its centre. He was getting up, all bloody about the throat where Chris had fastened on him, and madder than ever with rage, gasped out a repetition of his orders to have Gatrina seized and me taken away and shot.

Still fighting with the men about me I was being lugged and hustled and thrust out of the room, oblivious to everything but my insensate rage, and they had got me to the door when two officers entered the house.

"What is this riot?" cried one in a loud, stern tone; and the men about me started instantly at the voice and I felt their grip on me to relax.

"It is murder; nothing else," I shouted; and taking advantage of my captors' surprise, I broke from them and rushed back into the room to Gatrina and my poor Chris.

"Is he dead?" I asked her.

She looked up and I read the truth by the tears in her eyes.

"Poor, faithful Chris," she murmured, with a deep sigh, as her hand gently caressed the great head.

I could not speak. I had loved the dog so well—and never better than in the manner of his death. I bent over him for a moment with a feeling of irreparable loss, as at the death of a friend.

"He gave his life for me, Bourgwán. Poor old comrade," murmured Gatríná, using, unconsciously I think, the old term.

In that moment the tie of our common sorrow for the dog's death brought us as close together as even in those past days in the hills.

I made no reply. I could not. I was tongue-tied by the hampering rush of mingled emotions.

CHAPTER XXVII

MY DEFENCE

THE grip of a hand on my shoulder roused me from my reverie. A couple of soldiers stood one on either side of me; and as I turned I saw the red brute of a captain being supported out of the room. The officer who had arrived last had taken command and was sitting at a table with the lieutenant standing at his side. With much relief I recognized him at once. He was a Major Kireef whom I had met at the Palace reception.

I was placed in front of him, and two or three of the soldiers took up positions by Gatríná. As the major held my fate and perhaps my life in his hands, I scrutinized him closely. He was a man between forty and fifty years of age; his face strong but not harsh; his manner peremptory as of one accustomed to exact prompt obedience; but he gave me the impression that he would deal justly even if sternly. A vastly different type of man from the red-headed, passionate beast whose place he had taken. And I was heartily thankful for the exchange.

He glanced sharply at me and with a slight start turned to some notes he had made of what the others had told him. I guessed that he had some recollection of my features and was probably looking for my name.

"You are Major Kireef, I think?" I said, while his eyes were still on the papers. He looked up quickly and frowned.

"You are not to question me," he rapped out very curtly. Then: "I see no mention of your name here. What is it?"

"The man who has just left was going to have me shot without troubling to find out," I replied, getting that fact out as soon as I could.

"Be good enough to remember you are a prisoner, and that you will not help your case by either evading my questions or attempting to bring charges against others. Now, your name?"

"Chase F. Bergwyn, a citizen of the United States."

He dropped his pen in surprise and half started to his feet.

"Mr. Bergwyn?" he exclaimed. "It is not possible."

"If you can send a message to Colonel Petrosch he will confirm what I say, major. I met you at the Reception at the Palace just after my arrival in Belgrade. You may remember me,"

I had every cause to be satisfied with the effect of my words. He paused a moment as if in doubt what to do, and then waved back the soldiers who stood by me.

"Have the room cleared," he said to the lieutenant. "Put a chair for Mr. Bergwyn there." I moved my chair near to Gatrina and while the room was cleared, he busied himself with his notes.

"Shall I remain, major?" asked the lieutenant, when the men had gone.

"Yes, for the present"; and the young officer went back to his place, having to step over poor old Chris, whose body, now that the place was empty, lay in full view, a conspicuous, ghastly evidence of the wild scene just ended.

"There must surely have been some unaccountable

mistake, Mr. Bergwyn?" he said, interrogatively and courteously when we four were alone; "judging, that is, by the extraordinary story which has been told to me. I invite you to explain."

"I asked the captain who has been hurt to allow me to do so privately; but he declined. Let me thank you for having cleared the room. There is a further favour you can do me, and a much more important one. Let some one go at once in search of Colonel Petrosch. I won't disguise from you I have placed myself in a very awkward position, and as he and I have had some very confidential relations—you may perhaps know that—it is of vital importance I should have his assistance."

"This matter is in my hands, and I must investigate the facts before taking any other action. The charges against you are very grave—if you are indeed the person implicated."

"If you will put any questions I will answer them," I said, disappointed by his refusal of my request.

"You have represented yourself as an officer of the Servian army?"

"Yes."

"You, with others who appear to have escaped, violently ill-treated the guard who were sent here to arrest this lady—Princess Gatrina?"

"It may pass at that; although the ill-treatment was not very violent."

"You then forcibly took from five of the men their uniforms that your men might wear them as a disguise and personate troops of the line."

"Yes, that is true."

His eyebrows went up and he pursed his lips and shrugged his shoulders. Very ominous gestures.

"That is a very grave admission, Mr. Bergwyn."

"I am quite aware of it. It's a very tight corner, indeed."

"Now then as to your object. What was that?"

"I wished to prevent the Princess Gatrina being arrested by the army, and to place her in safety until the passions of this night's doings in the city had cooled sufficiently for the officers to have time to consider their course in regard to her."

"I am loath to take that answer, Mr. Bergwyn—it only makes your case worse."

"I can't help that, major. It is the truth."

"You interfered deliberately to oppose the plans of the army?"

"I interfered to prevent at least one deed of blood being done in the frenzy of to-night's passion."

"Who are you to set yourself against the army, sir?" he retorted very sternly.

"The English blood in my veins and my instincts as an American citizen alike revolt against the insensate violence of such an act as that intended, and I used such means as I had to prevent it. I staked my life on the issue; and if the army choose to claim the forfeit, I will pay it."

"Why do you say such an act was intended?"

"The answer is supplied in what has occurred to-night at the Palace, Major Kireef."

Gatrina, who had been listening breathlessly to all this, intervened then. "What has occurred at the Palace?" she asked strenuously. "Surely no violence."

"The King and Queen have come in conflict with the troops, and their Majesties have lost their lives in consequence." The answer was given with cold deliberation.

Gatrina was overcome by the news and threw herself back in her seat, her face covered by her hands.

"Are they the only lives that have been—lost?" I asked.

"I cannot answer you, Mr. Bergwyn."

"Perhaps not; but you can at any rate see in my question the reason for all I have done to-night—even if to you it does not appear to be a justification."

"The arrest of the Princess will of course take place," he answered, "and you, Mr. Bergwyn, will have to answer to the army for what you have done."

"I am ready to face the band; but if you'll send out in search of Colonel Petrosch, it will save much time, anxiety and trouble for all concerned."

"I must consider my course. I am not answerable to Colonel Petrosch alone, I fear. The Princess must be prepared to go with my men."

"I will go," declared Gatrina, with instant readiness.

"The Princess is already under arrest, Major Kireef. She is at your disposal here just as much as anywhere else. Why can she not remain until Colonel Petrosch comes? I have his word of honour that he will do everything in his power to protect her."

"I have my duty to do, Mr. Bergwyn."

"I am sure it cannot be your conception of duty to place her where she will be in danger of her life. It is but a matter of an hour or two. You are in possession of the house. No attempt will be made by her, I am sure, any more than by me, to escape. Let her remain here until at least Colonel Petrosch arrives."

He considered for a space, and then rose. "I accept your word, Mr. Bergwyn, and will leave you while I send for Colonel Petrosch, and consider what else to do."

I gave a deep sigh of relief when he left the room. I had pulled through the first stage; and that was something. I glanced at Gatrina's face, ashen, horror-filled, and drawn with trouble and suffering.

Now and again a moaning sigh burst from her lips and told me how acute was her agony. Twice I turned to make some clumsy attempt at consolation; but each time the look her face bore stopped the words on my lips, and I turned back to watch the light without strengthening slowly as the time crept on.

I had one consoling thought. The longer the interval between the fell occurrences at the Palace and the com-

ing of the soldiers for Gatrina, the stronger grew the hope that she might escape the fate which had been decreed for her.

That thought led me slowly to another—the necessity of having a definite proposal to make as to Gatrina's future movements. I remembered what Colonel Petrosch had said as to the wish of the army that she would go from Belgrade.

"We must speak about yourself," I said.

In her absorption and suffering she had not noticed my movement, and started nervously at the sound of my voice; but said nothing.

"Your danger is not yet passed." I continued; "and when the officers return we must have something definite to say about yourself."

"I care nothing for myself," she murmured, desolately.

"Your life is in danger, and you must care," I said, firmly.

"If they covet my life let them take it—after this."

"I will not let you say that. You are speaking now under the influence of these horrors, and from the feelings of desperation which they naturally prompt. But you must think of yourself, and you shall. You have no right to throw away your life because things have been done which you were powerless to prevent."

"Do you think I fear death? If they covet my life, let them take it," she repeated.

"The sacrifice of your life can do no good to those who are already dead, Princess. It is only cowardly to feel this indifference."

"I would rather be a coward and die than beg my life at the hands of these murderers. I will hear no more."

She spoke with animation, but further argument on my part was prevented by Colonel Petrosch and the Major entering the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII

" I CANNOT LEAVE MY COUNTRY "

THE black tragedy of the night had scored its mark deep on Colonel Petrosch, and I shall not readily forget the look of high-wrought strain which his face wore.

And I read Petrosch's look now to mean that he had helped to set in motion this wild revolt and was shocked by the violence already done and appalled by the prospect of what might yet have to follow.

I was glad to find it so. He might prove to be in a better mood to judge on its merits the effort I had made to save Gatrina. There had been enough horrors already to glut his anger ; and he looked to the future with apprehension genuine enough to render him willing to prevent the commission of more.

He greeted Gatrina and me very formally, as he and Major Kireef took their seats at the table.

" You have incurred a fearful responsibility, Mr. Bergwyn," he began. " Major Kireef has told me the facts. You have taken an unwarrantable course in attempting to thwart the army's purpose, and have used means which are inexcusable."

" They were the only means I could find to use."

" You have compromised yourself and all with you ; you have opposed the soldiers when carrying out the army's orders, and have subjected them to gross ill-treatment, in order that you might obtain disguises for your purpose. I can see neither excuse nor palliation for such conduct."

I made no reply to that tirade. I judged that he had not taken the trouble to come at such a time merely to lecture me on the heinousness of my conduct ; and as I cared nothing for what he said, and only for what he meant to do, I let him talk.

" You yourself see there is no answer," he continued ; and went on to condemn at considerable length with much detail the enormity of my offences, until I began

to be perplexed as to his motive. He couldn't have made the thing worse had he been going to order my instant execution.

I guessed at length, however, that his real object was to make me appreciate the extreme difficulty of the task I had set him to get me out of the mess. But the harangue had a very different effect upon Gatrina. The blacker he made my conduct appear and the more vividly he painted the danger in which I stood, the greater was her manifest agitation; and when he declared with very stern and significant deliberation that at such times men had lost their lives who had done less than I, I resolved to try and stop him.

" It will save time, Colonel Petrosch, if you are going to order me to be shot, to have it done at once," I said. " I am not in the least ashamed of a single thing I have done, except that I blundered and failed."

" Do I understand you to mean, Mr. Bergwyn," he cried, very sternly, " that you would have me report to my colleagues that in the face of all I have said you take pride in having set their authority at defiance ? "

A hot retort rose to my lips, but just before it passed, I caught his meaning and paused to consider my reply.

" No, I don't mean that. I recognize their authority fully. In so far as my actions have involved an apparent defiance of that authority, I must, of course, regret them."

" It would be impossible for the army to take any but the sternest view of such acts, when committed by one who is avowedly their enemy."

" You know better than any one in Belgrade whether I am to be classed as an enemy, Colonel. I am quite prepared to recognize their authority in the country; although feeling nothing but the strongest aversion from the hopeless deeds by which it has been enforced."

" These are no concerns of yours, sir."

" Except as they are the concerns of humanity. God send that the after consequences may prove in some sort the justification for what has been done."

"That is the prayer of us all," he answered, very solemnly, speaking out of that secret fear which possessed him.

A pause followed which Gatrina broke to ask : "Has any blood been shed beside that of the King and Queen, Colonel Petrosch ?"

"Madam, I cannot speak of these matters with you," he replied brusquely. "I came for other purposes—one of them to find a way if I can to place you out of—of the reach of harm." His hesitation over the last phrase was significant ; but the declaration gave me intense and unbounded satisfaction.

"I will deal with your case first, Mr. Bergwyn. May I take it that you regret your defiance of the army, and are prepared now to submit yourself unconditionally to their authority ?"

"Unconditionally ? What does that mean ?"

"That you will not again attempt to dispute it."

"I am prepared to express my regret and to recognize their authority."

"That is the same thing," he said. It was not, of course, but I concluded he needed some kind of assurance from me ; and when I had given it, he conferred in an undertone with Major Kireef. Then he rose. "I must speak with you in private, Mr. Bergwyn" ; and he led me to another room.

As soon as we were alone he took my hand and wrung it.

"You have caused a great deal of trouble, but personally I thank you for what you have done. I believe you have saved the Princess's life ; and God knows there have been too many taken."

"What has occurred ?"

"The King and Queen are dead ; the Queen's brothers have been shot ; several of the members of the Government have also fallen ; and the Princess was to have shared the same fate, because of her succession claims. But it may be possible to save her now."

“ Possible only ? ”

“ I used the term advisedly—possible. It must depend upon the course of events to-day.”

“ What will happen to-day ? ”

“ Who can tell ? The army holds the power ; and we believed from what we have already seen that the people will stand behind us to a man. The city has already broken out into rejoicings, and the soldiers are cheered everywhere. But a mob is as fickle as a summer breeze ; and if a change comes over them, nothing can save a conflict which may deluge the city, aye, the whole country, with blood. I am dazed when I think of it.”

“ And the Princess ? ”

“ I would not answer even for your safety, Mr. Bergwyn ; nor even for my own ; to say nothing of hers. But I hope all will be well. The leaders of the army have had their fill of horrors ; and if the day finds the people supporting them, this night will have seen the last of these measures of despair. God give that it may be so,” he cried with impressive earnestness.

“ Let us get to details,” I said after a pause. I was terribly anxious again. “ What do you advise ? ”

“ That you leave Belgrade at once for a time. Let me carry an expression of your regret back with me, and a pledge that the matter of the loan will be considered as soon as the new Government is established. You have acted in a way that, had you been other than you are, the army would never have forgiven ; but when once the present fever is past, there is no one who would think of dealing harshly with the man who can render the assistance you can. But much must depend on what happens later to-day, when the facts about the night’s doings at the Palace are published. Therefore I say, go for the time.”

“ And the men who were with me ? ”

“ Are they known ? ”

“ I think not. They were not arrested.”

"Then no inquiries will be made; but it would be safer for them also to leave for a time."

"And now the great question—the Princess?"

He paused and looked at me. "Would she leave with you?"

"Would she be allowed to leave?"

"She would be allowed to escape," he answered. "If she remains, she will be placed in confinement; and if the army's plans go right, she will be sent out of the country. The Queen's sisters have been placed in similar confinement; and they too will be liberated and exiled unless trouble comes. If that happens, the Princess would be again in imminent peril. She would be a menace to the only real solution of the crisis—the change of dynasty. And the army have given stern enough proofs of its resolve in that matter. It has already decided upon the future King—Peter Karageorgevics."

"Can I speak to her alone?"

"Yes! tell her what I have just said; and if you have any influence with her use every shred of it to prevail upon her to go. You will be doing not only her a service but the country also. I will return in an hour or so to learn the result."

"If she refuses to go?"

He threw up his hands. "There will be only one course open."

"Arrest?"

"Arrest, yes; with all its possibilities."

I went back then to Gatrina, and her eyes fastened upon my face instantly, full of apprehensive questioning anxiety.

An orderly came in almost directly with a message for the major, who went out, and then we two were alone again.

"About yourself?" asked Gatrina, eagerly, as the door closed behind them.

"I have no longer anything to fear. All that the Colonel said was for the other man's benefit, I think.

I am free to leave Belgrade when I will ; and indeed he urged me to do so at once."

" I am glad—so glad," she answered, with a wan smile and a sigh of relief. " He succeeded in frightening me. I did not realize before he spoke so, all you risked in this. I have been thinking while you were with him, and I see it now."

" I don't think there was ever any real risk of trouble. I had his promise from the outset to do all he could for me ; and of course there were other reasons."

" No risk, you say, after the conduct of that awful man whom poor old Chris attacked ? "

" Ah, poor old dog. How we shall miss him. Yet he could not have given his life for a better cause. If we ever come back to Belgrade, I'll have a reckoning with that bully."

She noticed that " we." She glanced sharply at me, and appeared as if to be going to speak of it, but stopped. " What has occurred at the Palace ? "

" The news is about as black as it can be " ; and I told her all that Petrosch had said to me. I was relieved to see that although she was deeply and indeed intensely affected, her grief was less poignant than before. Finding this, I dwelt with emphasis upon the position of the Queen's sisters ; until she understood my purpose.

" You are speaking of what you think will be my lot," she said.

" Yes. I don't wish to alarm you, but I know that that is what will be done—with this difference : that if the opposition to the army takes any active form, your danger will be greater even than theirs."

" I am not afraid."

" No one thinks that ; and I should be the last to think it."

" It is my duty to remain at whatever risk." She was very firm, very dignified, very much the Princess as she said this.

" Do you wish the Throne ? "

"No, no, a thousand times no. I am not fit for it. I am more a woman than a Princess; but I cannot think of myself."

"If you could think of yourself what would you do?"

"Why put idle questions?"

"Is it altogether idle? As a woman, you are barred from the succession by yourself. Even if your claims were admitted, you would have to marry some one who as your husband would be accepted by the nation as King; but he, not you, would be the ruler—even if the army were not bent upon changing the dynasty and had not already chosen their King."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, Colonel Petrosch has told me"; and I repeated the message he had authorized me to deliver.

"He told you to tell me that?"

"Yes, expressly and authoritatively."

"Why?"

"I think that you should see quite clearly the wisdom of adopting the course which will help the army leaders and so serve the country."

"You mean that I should play coward and run away. He set you to tempt me?"

"Is it a temptation?"

She thought earnestly and then exclaimed: "I cannot go. I cannot."

It was not now "I will not"; and I was glad to note the difference.

"If you could think of yourself what would you do?" I asked again.

"I answer as I did just now—why put that idle question to me?"

I paused and then plunged.

"Because—I love you, Gatrina."

"No, no, no; any answer but that; give any reason but that," she cried, as the red flushed into her cheeks till they flamed, and she sank back in her seat and hid them from me with her trembling hands.

I knelt by her side.

“ It is the truth, Gatrina ; why should I not say it ? Once before our hearts spoke. You remember that day on the hill at Samac. We knew it then ; what need to hide it now ? It is all in all to me. What is it to you ? ”

“ No, no, no,” she murmured hurriedly. She was trembling violently. “ It is impossible. It is impossible. I told you then.”

“ That is just what it is not now, whatever it may have seemed then. It is true I am only a——”

“ Hsh ! ” Just a whisper and a hand laid impulsively upon mine, and a glance of reproach from tender, loving eyes.

I closed my hand on hers and held it.

“ Well, only Bourgwán then,” I said, and she smiled. “ If you could think for yourself . . . ” I began again.

“ No,” she whispered. “ Don’t tempt me. You make it so hard for me.”

“ It must be as you decide,” I pleaded. “ But the world holds no other woman for me than you.”

At that she started, drew her hand away quickly, and bit her lip. “ I had forgotten,” she murmured.

I read her thought. It was of Elma’s lie. “ In that you did me grave wrong. I had no thought but for you in coming here ; and none in staying. You might have trusted me after that day at Samac.”

“ I did not mistrust you. I thought only of your——” she hesitated in sudden embarrassment.

“ Let all be clear now between us, Gatrina. We may never meet again or we may never part again—as you decide it. The stake is too great for us to risk it all for the lack of plain words. I know what is in your thoughts ; but on my honour it was never for an instant in mine, and never could be. Do believe that.”

“ I thought you felt it would be impossible for us—oh, it is so difficult.”

“ Then put your hand in mine again and I shall know the slander is understood.”

"It is still impossible, Bourgwán," she whispered. "I am so sorry"; and as if in pity for the pain I must feel she gave me her hand again.

"If you could think for yourself only?"

"God knows I would so gladly do as you wish."

It was sweet but yet sad hearing.

"I do wish it and do press it, not for my sake only, but for yours," I urged.

"I cannot, Bourgwán; I cannot leave my country."

"That is final?" I asked, looking into her eyes

"You make it so hard for me. I cannot. I cannot."

I lifted her hand and pressed my lips to it. I had failed; and with a heavy sigh rose and went back to my seat, with a feeling of blank desolateness.

"I have grieved you," she said gently when I had sat silent some while. "And you have done so much for——"

"Not that, please," I interposed, forcing a smile.

"I can never forget it," she replied. "We shall not meet again, as you said; but I can never forget it."

"May I ask one thing? If matters go with you so that you should ever have to leave the country, may I seek you again?"

"It is all sad for you—and for me, too, you know that—but it is kinder, if harder, not to give you groundless hope."

"I shall never cease to hope."

"I shall never leave my country," she answered, earnestly.

"I am answered, but not convinced," I replied, in quite as earnest a tone as hers; and then, to lighten the strain, I smiled and added: "If you will not leave it, I may have to leave mine and turn Serb."

"I should have at least one loyal subject then, I am sure."

As the words left her lips, the door opened and Colonel Petrosch returned.

CHAPTER XXIX

PETROSCH HAS A PLAN

A SINGLE glance at Colonel Petrosch convinced me that some change had taken place in the situation during his absence which he considered favourable. His step was less heavy ; the air of oppressed anxiousness was gone ; his face had lost that depressed, care-haunted, apprehensive look which I had seen before ; and his bearing was almost confident and bright.

He went at once to the matter in hand.

"I am glad to tell you you are free to leave, Mr. Bergwyn," he said, with obvious satisfaction.

"I am deeply obliged to you for your intervention, Colonel."

"Show it by leaving Belgrade by the first available train and remaining away for some days at least until matters have settled. Then we shall be ready to receive you."

"You have had news which you consider good?" I asked.

"Yes. I think the best we could have. There is now no room for reasonable doubt that the people will not only support the army's action, but will do so with enthusiasm. Every minute brings added proof of this. It is an intense and consummate relief."

"It is consummate shame and scandal that murder should be thus hailed with acclamation," cried Gatrina, indignantly.

"Those will be dangerous views to express to-day, madam," said Petrosch, turning to her. "You and I must of necessity look upon this revolution with very different feelings. What to you appears murder, I and those with me regard as the only gate to national liberty which was left open to us."

"Mr. Bergwyn has told me that many murders have been committed in the night. There will be a heavy reckoning for each of them."

"Lives have been taken, it is true, because, as we believe, no other course was left, if a violent revolution, followed by the horrors of a civil war, was to be avoided. Better for half a dozen lives to be taken deliberately than as many thousands in a civil war. What we have done we have done; and we leave the issue to God. The future will judge whether we have done right."

"Cold blooded murder cannot be justified by an appeal to the Almighty," said Gatrina, indignantly. "Who draws the sword himself shall feel the blade. You may seem to be successful; but by this fearsome appeal to blood you have raised a force which will crush you in the end with infinite disaster to the country."

Colonel Petrosch listened with pent brows, and replied with impressive deliberation. "I am disturbed to hear this from you, madam, and it compels me to put to you a question which I beg you to answer with due regard to the solemn consequences which your words may have for yourself. Do I understand you to mean that you yourself would take part in any movement or plans which might be made against the army and its decisions, and for the restoration of your family upon the throne?"

"No, no, indeed. God forbid that for any mere personal ends either word or act of mine should ever tend to plunge the country into the horrors of such a conflict."

Alarmed by his sudden change to severity, I was greatly relieved to hear Gatrina's words. So I think was he. He looked across at me.

"Have you told the Princess what I said to you before, Mr. Bergwyn?"

"Yes; but she does not see her way to leave the country."

"Voluntarily, you mean? But you cannot remain, madam," she said to her. "It is absolutely impossible."

"I will not leave, Colonel Petrosch."

He sighed. "I regret exceedingly to hear that unfortunate decision and trust you will recall it. I am authorized to tell you that if you will sign a document

abandoning all claim to the succession and leave the country voluntarily, your property and fortune shall not be forfeit."

"I shall not change my decision for a bribe, Colonel Petrosch," she answered instantly and proudly.

"It is not meant as a bribe; but your presence will be an embarrassment to the new Government, and in any case you must go. Must: it is imperative. Pray think, then, before you set the Government at defiance."

"I have given my decision, and nothing will alter it, Colonel Petrosch."

"That is your last word?"

"On that point, my last word."

"I regret it deeply. I have now no option but to tell you that you will be a prisoner."

"I shall make no attempt to run away," said Gatrina, getting up as she spoke.

"Wait," I broke in. "I should like to put a question or two."

Petrosch turned upon me an inscrutable look and replied with a show of sternness: "You can do nothing to influence our decision in such a matter, Mr. Bergwyn. The Princess has refused our offer. That is all."

"I don't think so," I answered bluntly. "Are we to understand that the Princess is in any danger from the acts of your agents? We have seen already what some of them are capable of doing."

"I am glad to be able to give an assurance that ample precautions will be taken for the Princess's personal safety during the few hours she will remain here. If you will take counsel from me, madam, I urge you to lose no time in preparing for your departure. We shall decide very quickly. I will now call the guard"; and he left the room.

I turned to Gatrina, and impulsively she put both her hands in mine and lifted her face and smiled.

"Good-bye," she murmured, her lips quivering.

"I wish you could have done as he asked."

"I wish I could—for your sake ; but . . ." she shook her head. "You have done so much for me. I can see your hand in all this."

"Give it up, Gatrina, for my sake," I cried, passionately, the love in me breaking all bounds. "You would trust yourself to me?"

"Ah, yes, gladly, if I could but be a coward. I should be a happy coward, Bourgwán ; but . . ."

"I cannot lose you. My God, I will not."

"Please, please be strong enough for us both. I am so weak when I think of you : of all that I am losing. But—I must stay. You know that in your heart. I must be true to my duty. For Heaven's sake help to save me from my weakness."

"I cannot lose you," I cried again.

"No, no. Leave it me to think of you as always doing the right thing. I want my memory of you undimmed. It must be good-bye."

"I cannot say it."

"There is no other word to say, Bourgwán. No other word. Do you know how hard you are making this for me?" she added gently after a pause.

I caught her and held her passionately.

"You love me."

Again she raised her face, now close to mine, and gazed into my eyes frankly.

"If I did not, should I care?" she whispered.

Slowly I bent my head till my lips touched hers ; and as they met she yielded to me and kissed me in return, and then let her head rest on my shoulder.

"Oh, how you make me wish I were a coward," she murmured. "It is harder than ever ; but it must be good-bye."

Gently she drew away and put her hands in mine as before.

"We must never meet again, Bourgwán," she said, with one of her sweet smiles. "You tempt me so. I could not trust myself again."

"God keep you, Gatrina. Good-bye"; and I pressed my lips to her hand and then led her to the door. With a last long look she passed out, and I was alone in the room—alone for always.

I was staring desolately out into the garden when Colonel Petrosch came back.

"I thought perhaps you might wish to say a word or two to the Princess, Mr. Bergwyn; and now I want to speak to you."

"Yes; what is it?" I answered, indifferently. Nothing mattered now. What he said or didn't say was all one to me.

"I am going to ask you for your confidence."

"Well?"

"About the—the Princess."

"Except to know that she will be safe, I would rather not speak of her," I answered, abruptly.

"I have heard the story that you met her when you were in the Bosnian hills under circumstances . . ."

But I wasn't having that and cut him short pretty brusquely.

"I should regard any question on such a subject as verging upon impertinence, Colonel Petrosch. Please ask none."

He smiled. "That is very much like confirmation. You must not lose your temper with me. I am an old man, you a young one, and I want to help you. If the Princess had been other than . . ."

"Stop right there, if you please," I cried, angrily.

But he only smiled. "Well, I'll put it another way. The Princess is a very obstinate young woman and——"

"The Princess has decided rightly, Colonel Petrosch."

"And the result of her decision is that in a few hours she will be sorely in need of a friend."

"What do you mean?"

"May I speak plainly what's in my mind—what was in it when I went out of the room just now?"

"Yes," I returned after a pause. "Have I been a fool?"

He did not answer that question in direct terms ; but he spoke very plainly, and what he said answered it indirectly. We had a brief but very pithy conversation ; and at the end of it I got up and shook his hand effusively and " God blessed him," bade him good-bye, and scampered off to my house more like a schoolboy than a man of many cares, and with no longer any thought of the prospect of desolate loneliness which had appeared to threaten me so gloomily only a few minutes before.

As I passed through the streets there were already abundant signs of the popular feeling. Early though the hour was, flags were flying, decorations being hurriedly prepared, men and women were abroad gaily dressed, and every one getting ready to join in what was clearly to be a public holiday.

I found my servants vastly uneasy at my absence during the night. Even the placid Buller was excited.

" Thank God you have come, sir. We dursten't go to bed. We didn't know what to think or do."

" I dare say you didn't, but get a hustle on you now and pack up. I'm leaving in a couple of hours and want my light baggage with me. Pick out enough for a few days ; and express all the heavy trunks to Vienna."

" Thank God, sir," he exclaimed, fervently.

" Well, get going then—you'll have time for thanksgiving on the cars," I said, as he hesitated. " And tell some one to get me some breakfast."

I dashed into my bedroom, had a bath and changed out of Nikolitch's uniform—which was a good deal the worse for the night's wear—had my breakfast, establishing probably an American record for eating speed, and sat down to knock off the cables and letters which my hurried departure necessitated.

I was deep in one to Nikolitch explaining things and telling him I had made all excuses for him with Petrosch, when Karasch arrived.

" I hardly hoped to find you——" he began.

"You must shelve all that, Karasch," I interposed. "You've got to leave the city with me in less than an hour from now; and see here, take money to pay those men liberally for what they did last night and tell them they'd better hold their tongues and skip for a while. You must be at the dépôt in an hour ready to go."

"Are you . . ."

"Don't ask a question now. All has gone right. Be off with you," and I got up and opened the door to hustle him off, as I did so, Elma was in the hall, and Buller was protesting that I could not receive her.

At sight of me she pushed past him and came into my room. She was as full of agitation as a sitting hen over her first chick; and when she saw from my face that I was in high spirits her astonishment was boundless.

"I'm leaving," I said, pithily.

"Running away?" she exclaimed.

"That's about the size of it. Can I do anything for you in Vienna?" I had no anger left for her, or indeed for any one.

"You have heard the news?"

"Some."

"About the murders last night?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to run away while she is in danger?"

"Who?"

"Who?" she repeated with a scoff. "Gatrina, I mean, of course."

"I don't know that she's in any particular peril. I called there last night."

"How can you speak so lightly as that? She must be saved at any cost. I've come to offer to help you save her."

"From what?"

"Death," she said, with tragic earnestness.

"What can one do? The army is all powerful. I must think of myself."

"Good God, are you such a coward?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "A man must think of his own life. I've no fancy to risk mine."

Her face was a study in contempt. "You mean you will not attempt to save her?"

"I tell you I'm bolting. I don't suppose her fate will be anything very terrible, and perhaps after all she deserves it. Anyway, I shall not think of opposing the army in the matter."

She drew her breath quickly and looked at me with almost fierce disdain. "You coward! Oh, you coward," she cried.

"I suppose it isn't very brave. But then I never set up for a hero."

"But if I tell you that I know her death has been decided upon and that if you will help, we can save her?"

"It wouldn't make any difference to me. You see I'm packed up, and even my train is chosen. I simply can't stop. Besides, I expect you've been misinformed."

"I tell you I know it," she cried, fiercely, as if seeking to rouse me.

"Then I'm afraid the bottom will be knocked out of your marriage scheme in regard to her. Still, I dare say you'll hatch another."

This was the limit. She fell back a pace, stared at me aghast, and then broke out into a violent tirade of denunciation and abuse of my cowardice and generally contemptible conduct.

"Now let me say half a dozen plain words, Baroness," I replied, when she paused for lack of breath. "During the last days I have been here you have done your utmost against me; every weapon you could find you have used without scruple to try and ruin me. You failed every time; and now you come with some other plan in that subtle and beautiful head of yours to try and lure me into a last net. For the time I came very near to fearing you; I don't like saying ugly things to

a woman ; and I'll just content myself with the confession that I no longer fear anything you can do, and pay no heed whatever to anything you can say. That's all. And now, as I'm busy getting ready to run away, as you call it, I must ask you to excuse me."

"You have some other scheme?" she cried.

"You can put it that I'm running away ; and leave it at that."

"I don't believe it."

"That's not polite, to say the least of it." I rang the bell. "Buller, have you packed up yet?" I asked when he came.

"Yes, sir."

"And directed that the heavy luggage is expressed to Vienna?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the carriage?"

"Yes, sir. It will be at the door in a quarter of an hour, sir."

"That will do. You hear that?" I asked Elma.

She made a gesture of angry impatience. "I can't understand you."

"It means good-bye, Baroness. I have still some letters to finish and arrangements to complete, and have, as you hear, only fifteen minutes. I part without any anger"; and I held out my hand.

"I will save Gatrina without you," she exclaimed, not taking my hand.

"I don't think any one can do that, but it's very good of you to try," I replied with a conventional smile.

This appeared to kindle all her rage again to white heat. She stared at me a moment, then raised her arms above her head and with a passionate ejaculation of disgust, swept out of the room.

Her complete mystification and indignant wrath gave me intense satisfaction, and with a chuckle of enjoyment I sat down again and finished my letters just in time to drive hurriedly to the dépôt and catch my train.

But I did not take tickets for Vienna, for that was not my destination.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CAMP AGAIN

BULLER's patience and respectful stolidity was sorely strained that day. In the first place I told him nothing about our destination; and when we made several changes during the journey only to alight at the exceedingly unpromising *dépôt* at Samac in the afternoon, his manner began to afford me genuine amusement.

"Do we wait here long for the train, sir?" he asked, as if the sooner we were off again the better.

"Only until Karasch can get a carriage or some horses, Buller. I suppose you can ride, by the by?"

"Yes, sir; that is—oh, yes, sir—a little."

Karasch got four horses after some difficulty but no carriage; one to carry my valises. They were four rank bad animals; but they carried us to Poabja, albeit with much discomfort for Buller. But his disgust appeared to reach a climax when he saw the little inn and I told him it was our hotel.

"That, sir?" he exclaimed, incredulously, with a very wry face.

"They have some excellent black bread there, Buller, and the water is as fine as any in the district."

"Yes, sir," he replied mechanically, as he got off his horse awkwardly. He was very stiff and discomfited. "Beg pardon, sir, but do we stay long here?" he asked, dejectedly.

"Not more than a month or two—till we start to rough it in the hills."

He groaned and his face fell so that I laughed, and to hide it dismounted and told him to go into the house and make such arrangements as he could for our accommodation, without mentioning my name. "Be very guarded, Buller, for much hangs upon your discretion,

and I don't want our lives to be imperilled by any loose talk."

Then I walked away up the narrow hilly street, whistling. I was in such spirits that I could not resist the temptation of playing this small joke upon my superlatively proper and decorous servant. In my humour, the veriest trifle set me smiling, the minutest detail of life in the little place interested me.

The children came out to stare at me and I scattered some small coins among them and brought them about me in a scrambling, laughing, boisterous crowd. Some of the men recognized me; and I stopped now and again to exchange a word of two with them and give them money. The whole of the little street was full of smiling faces and I had such a bodyguard when I reached Father Michel's cottage, that the good priest came out in some surprise to learn the cause of the clatter.

"I need your protection again, father," I cried cheerily; "but from a different sort of crowd this time. Let me come in and talk to you, and send these young brigands away. They take *me* for the witch this time with a power to coin money."

"I bid you welcome sir," he said gravely as he bade the youngsters run home, and led me indoors.

I was closeted with him for an hour or more, telling him many things which vastly surprised him, gaining his help for the purpose I had in view, preparing him for what was coming, and binding him to secrecy until the time arrived for all to be explained.

When I got back to the inn Karasch, as the result of my instructions had a carriage ready, and Buller looking very glum and very much out of his element was standing by a saddle horse for me.

"You can go on, Karasch, I shall overtake you," I said, and he drove off.

"Am I not to go, sir?" asked Buller, nervously.

"No, Buller, thank you. You stay here. And

mind, don't get quarrelling; these people are very good-natured, but very handy with the knife."

"Beg pardon, sir, but how long am I to stay here alone?"

"You're not frightened, are you?"

"No, I hope not, sir, but if anything's likely to happen—to you, sir, I mean I'd like to know of it, in case I could help."

"I think I've done you some injustice, Buller, and I'm sorry." I was pleased by his words. "Nothing will happen—nothing dangerous that is. All is as right as it could be. I've come here for a special purpose; and we shall all be away to-morrow or very soon after, for Vienna I expect. All you need do is—to amuse yourself for an hour or two. If you go out, walk down the hill and not up; I don't want you to be seen up that way. I shall be back soon after dark; and you can hunt around and get me the best thing in the way of dinner you can contrive."

"Thank you, sir," he said in a tone of obvious relief; and stepped back, as I mounted and rode after Karasch on the road back to the station at Samac.

"All you've got to be careful about, Karasch," I told him when we reached there; "is not to let your face be seen. It's quite dark, so there's very little risk."

I tethered my horse out of sight and walked up the little hill where Gatrina and I had had our talk that day, and waited there, thinking of her and of much that had passed since we had parted there, and she had sent poor old Chris back to me. The picture was very vivid in my thoughts; her retreating figure on the winding path, and the old dog coming slowly up the path toward me and turning to look after her; when the reverie was broken by the noise of the coming train, and I hurried down the hill back to the station.

I found a spot where I could get close enough to observe what occurred without being seen.

The last car was a saloon from which three men in the uniform of officers alighted. One of them turned and helped out a lady, a somewhat portly person who appeared to be stiff and cramped with a long journey. Then without assistance another lady stepped out and looked about her as if recognizing the place.

All five passed through the station house, and one of the men spoke to Karasch, who murmured some reply and touched his hat. Four of them entered the carriage and the fifth got up by Karasch, who then drove off.

The station master and his assistants stood looking after the carriage and gossiping with three peasants and a woman, the only other passengers by the train; and were still discussing the possible meaning of the unusual event as I mounted and rode away.

I kept well behind but I was near enough to the carriage when it reached the priest's house to see him come out, exchange a few words with the officers, and then lead some one into the house. He returned and spoke again to the officers, all three of whom entered the carriage, which passed me directly afterwards on the return to Samac.

I rode on to the inn, and having an hour to wait, I filled up the time by changing my clothes and eating the dinner which Buller had had prepared. I was in a condition of intense nervous excitement, and kept glancing at my watch wishing the time to pass, impatient of the delay. I was intensely absorbed by the thought of what was to follow, and yet curiously conscious of Buller's consequential pride at having provided so good a meal under such circumstances and profound disappointment at my failure to be impressed by his cleverness.

At last the time was up and I started for the priest's house, followed by a look of blank dismay from Buller because I left before his chief dish was served. I was halfway up the street when the reason of his look flashed upon me, and I burst out laughing.

Some one was waiting for me in the priest's garden and fetched him immediately.

"She is very sad and depressed, but she asked to be brought to me, it seems. She is in there"; and he pointed to a door which stood ajar.

I pushed it open and entered.

She was sitting with her back to the door in a very dejected attitude, and thinking it was Father Michel who had returned, she did not look round, but said, as I closed the door—

"You have many calls on your time."

"Well, I've been pretty busy during the last week," I answered.

She jumped up at the sound of my voice and turned to me a face pale for a fleeting second and then flushing with the glory of rich, deep crimson.

"Bourgowan!"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, Bourgowan, no other"; and I stretched my hands to her.

She held hers back and tried to look indignant.

"What does this mean?"

"You must blame Petrosch. He's the villain of the piece."

Despite her efforts her eyes smiled.

"This is a conspiracy, then," she cried.

"That's about the size of it. They've been pretty plentiful lately, you see."

"I had no idea . . ."

"That was the conspiracy, of course," I broke in.

"He's a subtle villain, Petrosch. I was a mere child in his hands."

The smile was spreading very fast all over her face now.

"I ought to be very angry," she exclaimed.

"Yes, he's broken up all my plans shamefully. Instead of being in Vienna on my way back to the States, here I am, just Bourgowan again, and you're just Mademoiselle. And goodness knows now what's going to happen."

We both laughed then and she no longer held back her hands. I held them instead.

"I don't understand yet in the least."

"Well, you see it was like this. I thought you would rather that Father Michel than any other priest should——"

"Bourgowan!" she cried, quickly.

"Wasn't that right?" I asked, with an air of innocence.

"Do you mean that Colonel Petrosch . . ."

"Yes. He's a dreadful scoundrel to guess things."

"Do you know that I am a beggar and an exile?"

"Yes, indeed. He told me all about it; and I was awfully glad. There's another country over seas which will be glad to adopt you. It's a free country, too; with a home in it where we shan't be quite beggars."

"Bourgowan! I told you it was impossible."

"And I told you that we're forgetting how to spell that word in the States; although I came near learning it in Belgrade."

"But I—I have nothing."

"Oh yes, you have. You can draw a bill on the bank of my affection and I'll honour it right now—to any amount."

"You make a jest of it," she said, now between laughter and tears.

"Well, don't you think they made things serious enough for us in Belgrade? What you've got to do is just to forget all that, and to laugh and be glad—if you are glad; and then to—well, there is something else to do"; and I looked grave.

"What is that?"

"It's a very serious thing, very serious, indeed. But I think I ought to tell you, and I think you ought to do it if your laughter is to ring true."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Yes, quite. Did you know that when we were here before there was a man very badly wounded—desper-

ately, in fact. I was speaking to Father Michel to-day about it and I told him I was sure you would not like to have such a thing on your conscience without doing all you could to help him. That was right, wasn't it ? ”

“ Of course. Was it that struggle in the street here ? ”

“ No, the man doesn't belong to Poabja ; but he was here to-day. The poor fellow will never get over the wound. And he blames you, and feels that you alone can save him.”

“ Wound ? Blames me ? What can I do ? ”

“ Marry him.”

“ Bourgowan ! ” she cried, changing on the instant from puzzled pity to laughing confusion ; and then—well, no matter what then.

Soon afterwards we sat down together and had a good, square talk which did not end until she had agreed that we had better consult Father Michel about the details.

I was a happier man than ever when, after a very informal little ceremony in Father Michel's quaint, crude church very early in the morning, we started to indulge a mutual wish to have a last look at the camp which had been so much to us.

What a ride that was ! What memories it roused ! How delighted was Gatrina with everything ! And in what spirits ! How we chattered and laughed, and laughed and chattered, forgetting for the time, selfishly if you will in our own happiness, the gloom and tragedy from which we had just emerged. The world appeared all bright and glorious for us, and care and trouble far away.

Karasch was with us, of course ; solemn, reserved and taciturn as ever ; but breaking into a sort of grim smile whenever Gatrina spoke to him to point out some bit of the road where some incident of that other ride had occurred.

Buller I packed off to Samac to go by rail and meet

us afterwards at a place to which we could get the train from Tuzla on the other side of the camp. He did not belong to our hill comradeship and would have been in the way.

We were careful to have a guide this time ; and how we laughed now when he told us we must have come at least ten or fifteen miles out of our way during that comradeship ride of ours by the compass. We could laugh at anything.

We turned aside to visit the hill where we had slept on the morning after the check by the two rivers, and Gatrina recognized with a positive relish the spot where she had washed on the brink of the stream.

And when at last we came near the long, stiff hill in the middle of which was the ravine leading to the camp, her excitement and pleasure were greater than ever. We chattered just like two glad children, first about the incidents of her flight and rescue, and then about that little contest of wills we had had the following morning, and indeed about every incident of the time at the camp.

Then came the camp itself, and Gatrina's unbounded surprise that already men were there getting ready for the mining work. I told her what I had done in Vienna and that in the superintendent we might look to find our old enemy, Captain Hanske, the Austrian official with whom we had taken such rough liberties that memorable night.

We could stay but an hour there if we were to reach Tuzla before nightfall, the guide told us ; and Gatrina and I spent the first few minutes in the little hut which she had occupied.

It was a place full of mingled reminiscences for us ; and while we were there our thoughts slipped back to the moment when, as I knew and my sweet wife now confessed, we had fallen in love.

" I think I knew it first," she said, with a winsome blush, " when we came back here alone after that trial

of will, Bourgwán. You were very obstinate; but I—I—I won't tell you any more."

"I knew it before that; when you stood at bay against those scoundrels out on the hills there. But you must have thought me an awful scarecrow."

"I did think you were a peasant, when I knew you were not a brigand. And when I found out my mistake, I could have bitten out my tongue for the way I had spoken to you."

"I was a brigand. I stole your heart."

She looked up with a bright, merry smile and was about to answer when some noise and confusion outside startled her.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Quite realistic—like it used to be. We'll see."

We went out and I laughed aloud at what we saw. Karasch had been seized by a couple of men who were leading him towards us while the little Austrian ex-official, now the superintendent, was abusing him volubly and with almost frantic gesticulations.

He was a sharp fellow and the instant his eyes fell on us he recognized us, and calling some more men from the tent, he ran towards me shouting, "Here's the other man. So we meet at last, eh? And you, too?" he cried to Gatrina, who was inclined to be frightened and held my arm tight.

"You have good eyes and a keen memory for faces, Captain Hanske. I congratulate you. We only met in the dark and I see you recognize us."

"Ah, you admit it, you admit it, do you?" he said, very excitedly. "Now I'll show you what it is to assault me, and I'll know who you are and all about you."

"There isn't the least doubt about that. But don't be excited. I am Mr. Bergwyn, the American, associated with Graf von Hartstein of Vienna in working the mines here. I told him how I had treated you that night and as a recompense had you appointed here."

His jaw dropped as he gazed at me in amazement.

The silence was broken by a laugh, deep, raucous and loud, from Karasch—the only loud laugh I ever heard from him.

"It's all right, superintendent," I added. "I can understand your bewilderment and your mistake. Tell me how the work promises. Let Karasch there go."

"Mr. Bergwyn," he stammered. "I am—I don't know what to say."

"Then don't try. We've had enough of it. Just show the things."

He was a very humble and bewildered superintendent then, and so ashamed that Gatrina spoke to him to try and put him at his ease while he showed us about the place until the guide sent word that we must start.

We were standing in the tent then and were alone.

"This is where you had the fight with Karasch, Bourgowan, and his arm was broken, isn't it?"

"Yes, when Chris, the other member of the comradeship, was on guard with you."

"Dear old Chris," she replied. "I am so sorry."

"Something else happened here beside that fight."

"What was that?"

"You told me just now when you think you knew. Well, it was here I first hoped."

"Hoped?" she cried, her face wrinkling and her eyes questioning.

"Yes, hoped. You remember I lay here after that blow on the head."

"Yes, there"; and she pointed to the very spot.

"Some one watched by me here, when I was unconscious."

She began to understand.

"You mean Chris?" she asked with an air of unconcern.

"No; I mean I wasn't unconscious quite so long as you thought and you——"

"Bourgwan! the guide says we must go," she cried quickly, with a lovely blush.

"And when you did, I began to hope."

"We mustn't keep him any longer."

"I think he could wait while you—do it again."

But she laughed and tossed her head and walked out of the tent.

As we crossed to the horses, she said: "I don't know what you must have thought."

"I thought you might do it again, so I remained unconscious."

As I put her on her horse, she whispered: "I was going to, but Karasch came"; and then shook the reins and started.

I caught her up a moment afterwards and by a mutual impulse we turned and had a last look. It was a wild, meagre, rough, dirty and abominably squalid place—but very dear to us.

"Good-bye, old comradeship camp," said Gatrina, smiling, with a tear in close attendance, I think. "It might be lovelier," she added, "but it couldn't be dearer in my thoughts."

"Nor in mine—for it gave me you."

"And me my Bourgwan—I may well love it."

We sat on the horses just gazing back, both heart-full, until the silence was broken by a shout from the now impatient guide; and we wheeled about and hurried after him.

THE END



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